

Decoding Dictatorial Statues

They are only a few hour's driving distance away, but to Ted Hyunhak Yoon they could be situated in a parallel universe: the new statues that are revealed in his neighboring country at regular intervals. Although Kim Il-sung died in 1994, he received the title of Eternal President and materialized this honor by leaving 34,000 granite and marble statues of himself—a number that continues to grow. Once more the surrounding cloth falls away from a towering Kim Il-sung; the camera glides across thousands of grateful faces; once more the applause never seems to diminish in force. How can it be that a crowd of people who were once the neighbors of Yoon's grandparents is now reversing the sculpted alter egos of their leaders? What does this crowd see that Yoon cannot perceive? What makes these statues so impenetrable?

As a graphic designer, always involved with visual communication, Yoon decided to investigate what it is that makes the visual language of these statues so powerful. In 2014 he started compiling an image archive of dictator's statues. Though the photographs stem from various regions and eras, the statues share at least one common feature: standing on their pedestal as if it were a stage, they lend visibility to the performance of communication.

The process began long before the pictures were taken. It started with a sender who decided that information must be transmitted to a large group of receivers. Instead of writing this information out in large print, or casting it in enormous letters of concrete or bronze, the information was compressed into a symbolic form: the depiction of a person. Therefore the statue could be regarded as a code or a collection of codes:

A hand tucked into a pocket.
A hand raised forward.
Fingers spread flat or palms facing up.
The hem of a coat moving in a concrete gust of wind.
A knee with a book resting on it.
A foot, frozen in marble, taking a decisive step forward.
A book tightly clenched under an arm.

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윤현학의 프로젝트 Decoding Dictatorial Statues는 있는 동상을 바라보는 다양한 방식에 대한 이미지와 동상에 대한 다른 필자들의 텍스트를 모은 출판물이다. '왜 역사·정치적 인물들의 동상은 민주주의 국가의 대중들에게 논쟁적으로 다가가는가?'라는 질문을 시작으로 이 프로젝트는 우리가 동상의 시각적 언어, 물질성과 객체성, 미디어 아이콘으로서의 역할, 그리고 정치적 논쟁 속 위치하는 동상들의 목소리에 대한 다양한 해독·해석의 가능성을 탐구하고자 하는 시도이다.

윤현학은 책 속에서 동상 자체의 시각적 언어를 관찰하고, 그 표현 방식에서 '제스처(Gesture)'의 형태로 주로 나타나는 클리셰(cliché)들을 이미지 리서치를 통해 다룬다. 이는 윤현학이 대학원 재학시절 이 프로젝트의 전신 격인 Decoding Dictators' Statues(독재자의 동상을 한정시켜 다뤘던 이전 작업)에서 이어져 오는 작업 방식으로, 최종적인 결과물인 해당 작업에서도 작업의 큰 축을 차지한다. 프로젝트 초기에 독재자들의 동상들- 구소련의 레닌, 중국의 마오쩌둥, 북한의 김일성 김정일의 동상들을 관찰하는 행위가 그 시작이었다면, 그 후 독재자들의 동상의 반복적인 포즈, 오른손을 높이 들고 있는 포즈 같은 이미지들을 수집하고, 이후 독재자의 동상의 이미지를 모으는 것에서 더 나아가 동상에서 나타나는 부분적인 클리셰(Cliché)를 확대하고 잘라내는 이미지 콜라주의 형태로 더욱더 구체화했다.

리서치의 주제적 갈래가 명확해질 무렵 출판물로서의 형태가 구체화되기 시작했는데, 이 책에서는 이미지 리서치를 통해 프로젝트의 중추적인 뼈대를 구축하고자 하는 의도로 윤현학의 이미지 리서치를 책의 앞과 뒤에 배치하고, 다양한 분야의 저술가들의 참여를 통해 각자가 리서치한 동상에 관해서 이야기할 수 있는 주제적 다양성을 확보하여 이미지 리서치와의 평행한 구조를 의도했다. 이로써 윤현학을 포함한 다른 리서처로 이루어진 분석가들(Decoders)이 '동상'이라는 한 카테고리 안에서 다양한 시각을 포괄한 '확장성'을 도모하고자 했다. 이러한 다양한 방식의 이야기를 통해, 동상의 제스처를 해체하며 그 안에 담긴 이미지의 의미를 다시 바라보는 시각과 동상이 조장하는 실제 사안을 탐구하는 시각들을 통해 동상을 보다 다층적이고 교차적인 방식으로 바라볼 수 있는 '동상'을 해체하는 새로운 방식을 제시하고자 했다. 📖

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The book, the hand, the coat, but also the presence of the pedestal and the visual lines that determine how the statue will nestle itself in your field of vision—all these aspects contribute to the way a message is transmitted to the receiver. During the “reading” of a statue, the depicted figure and the meanings inscribed in it switch positions for a split second. Unaware, the receiver translates the codes.

He who brought us prosperity.
She who died a martyr.
He, the revolutionary.
He, the people’s father watching over us.

Though Yoon initially began ordering and regrouping a series of images as if it were a deck of cards, he slowly shifted towards a more physical approach, towards a decomposition of the statues. Yoon’s dissections attempt to identify the visual rules and phenomena that exist within—and lie underneath—these statues. His visual analysis forms the backbone of this publication. In an era electrified by debates around the relocation or removal of statues with charged biographies, Yoon’s work extends beyond design and research: I consider him a silent tubular. By isolating the statues from their pedestals he illustrates how the Latin word status—which translates as “that which is set up”—requires just a hint of poetic license to be understood as something that is in itself “a set-up”.

When Yoon invited me to become the editor of this project, I wondered if wanting to prescribe a certain perspective is not the basic premise of any given status. Were the immortalizations of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville (US), Cecil John Rhodes in Cape Town (SA), and Jan Pieterszoon Coen in Hoorn (NL) not meant to shape our views on the depicted persons, their histories, and the accompanying power structures for centuries? And what about the many statues that are not currently up for discussion and continue to stare onto the horizon, unconcerned, on squares and in parks around the globe? We crane our necks toward them, and almost without noticing it, we translate a series of signs into meanings. Doesn’t each and every statue, then, in some way dictate our ways of seeing?

This is where the other party in the performance of communication comes into play: the recipient. While the sender has managed to solidify an array of information and agendas into the statue, the relationship with the public is also inextricably locked into that densely compressed object. The man who reads the statue as a symbol of better days, the woman who deciphers the same statue as a dystopian sign, the cheering head in a festive crowd, the historian for whom each statue is made to be brought down: a single object can somehow accommodate all of them. In this book, you will find ten essays by ten such receivers—researchers, (art) historians, curators, a philosopher, and an artist. Together these authors act as decoders. Statues from different eras, located in different parts of the world, face present-day questions and form the starting point for precise and at times very personal dissections.

Historian Leonor Faber-Jonker for example, unravels the stories surrounding the site of a statue of Stalin that vanished from a Berlin Allee. With two pieces saved—his mustache and his left ear—and the rest of the sculpture having been recast, Faber-Jonker wonders how much of his being is still present.

For the philosopher, Martijn Wallage statues are among those things, like windows and shadows, that inspire philosophical thought. His essay invites us to

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look below its surface and think about time and eternity, matter and form, body and soul.

The essay of curator Jo-Lene Ong revolves around the statue of a British colonial in Singapore’s central business district. The work of artist Lee Wen, in which some nearby scaffolding puts the audience on equal standing with the statue, serves as a mirror to reflect on the foundations of this celebrated icon and tourist attraction.

Following this, historian Karwan Fatah-Black questions the idea of historical value by rendering the preludes and responses to the removal of colonial monuments in South Africa, the Netherlands, and the United States.

In the essay of artist and researcher Florian Göttke, we are guided through the cacophonous making process and subsequent crumbling of a media icon. We follow how the images of Saddam Hussein’s toppled statue became a central feature in the narrative of the Iraq war; sometimes unfolding in unforeseen ways.

Art historian Erika Doss then analyses how a statue of the Trung Sisters, a 2000-year-old Vietnamese devotional subject, could provoke an outbreak of cultural vandalism when it was appropriated by the ruling elite of the Republic of Vietnam.

Subsequently, design historian and graphic designer J.R. Jenkins decodes the feminine in East German public sculptures. Led by her extensive image research, she dissects the subtle and not-so-subtle manifestations of gender-coding in the portrayal of socialist life.

Historian Tycho van der Hoog got intrigued by the amount of socialist realist-style statues he encountered when he traveled through Namibia. Why would a recently liberated African country opt for a North Korean company to tell its history?

Discussing a few contemporary artworks, curator Jintaeg Jang examines how the images of statues of dictators, once manufactured to fortify an ideology, are now being molded and re-molded by artists.

The closing essay is by art historian Fabienne Rachmadiev who examines her childhood memories of a Lenin statue found in her former playground and a series of idyllic Soviet postcards. It’s through this act that Rachmadiev offers us a glance at the Lenin cult found in Central Asia.

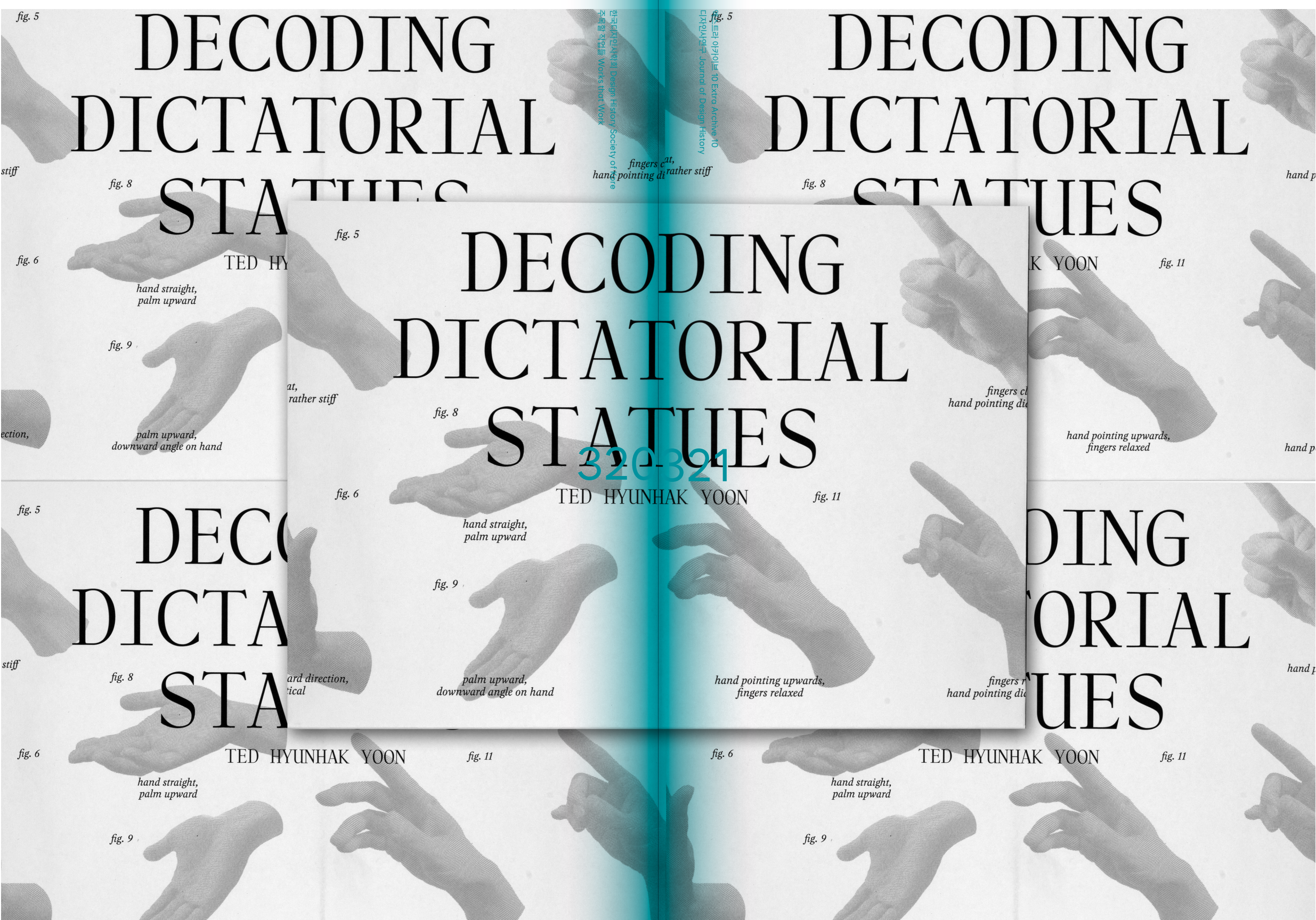
As a counterpart to Yoon’s visual analysis, the essays of these ten authors offer a variety of decodings. They anatomize as it were, the object-hood of statues and their image-making qualities, their role as media icons, and their tangled position in a web of sociopolitical, historical, and present-day meanings. They take the statue off its pedestal, thus letting us, the perceiver, take the stage. 🎤

베른케 클라인 잔트보르트 Bernke Klein Zandvoort

www.bernkekleinzandvoort.com

문학과 시각 예술 분야 사이를 오가며 작업하는 Bernke Klein Zandvoort의 모든 작업 면면에는 텍스트와 내러티브에 관한 그녀의 관심이 묻어 난다. 시집과 문학 에세이를 출판했고, 비디오 작업, 강의-공연, 라이브 비디오 에세이 등을 작업해왔다. 프리랜서 편집자, 교육자, 관련 자문 활동을 하고 있다.

With her practice, Bernke Klein Zandvoort moves between the fields of literature and visual arts. She is interested in text and narrative in all their appearances. She has published poetry books and literary essays, makes video work, lecture-performances and live video essays. In addition, she works as a freelance editor, teacher and advisor.



DECODING DICTATORIAL STATUES

TED HYUNHAK YOON

fig. 5

DECODING DICTATORIAL STATUES

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TED HYUNHAK YOON

fig. 11

DECODING DICTATORIAL STATUES

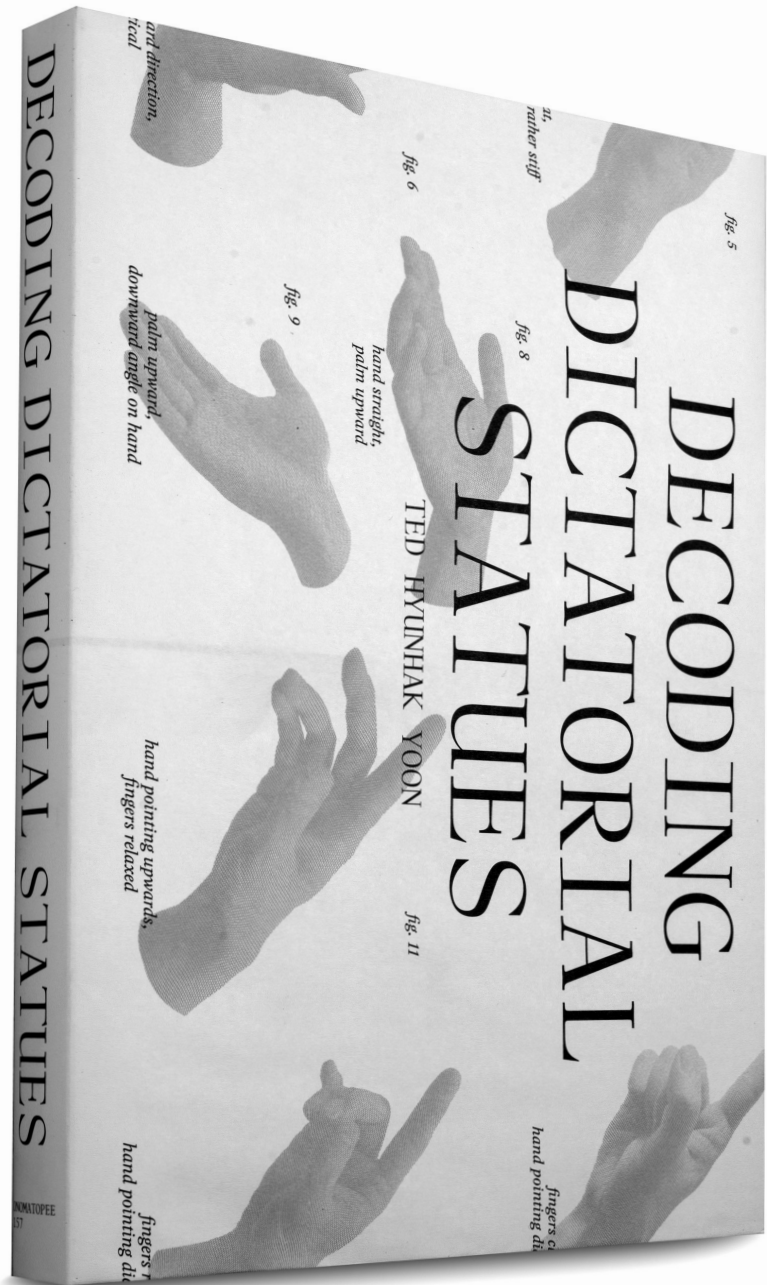
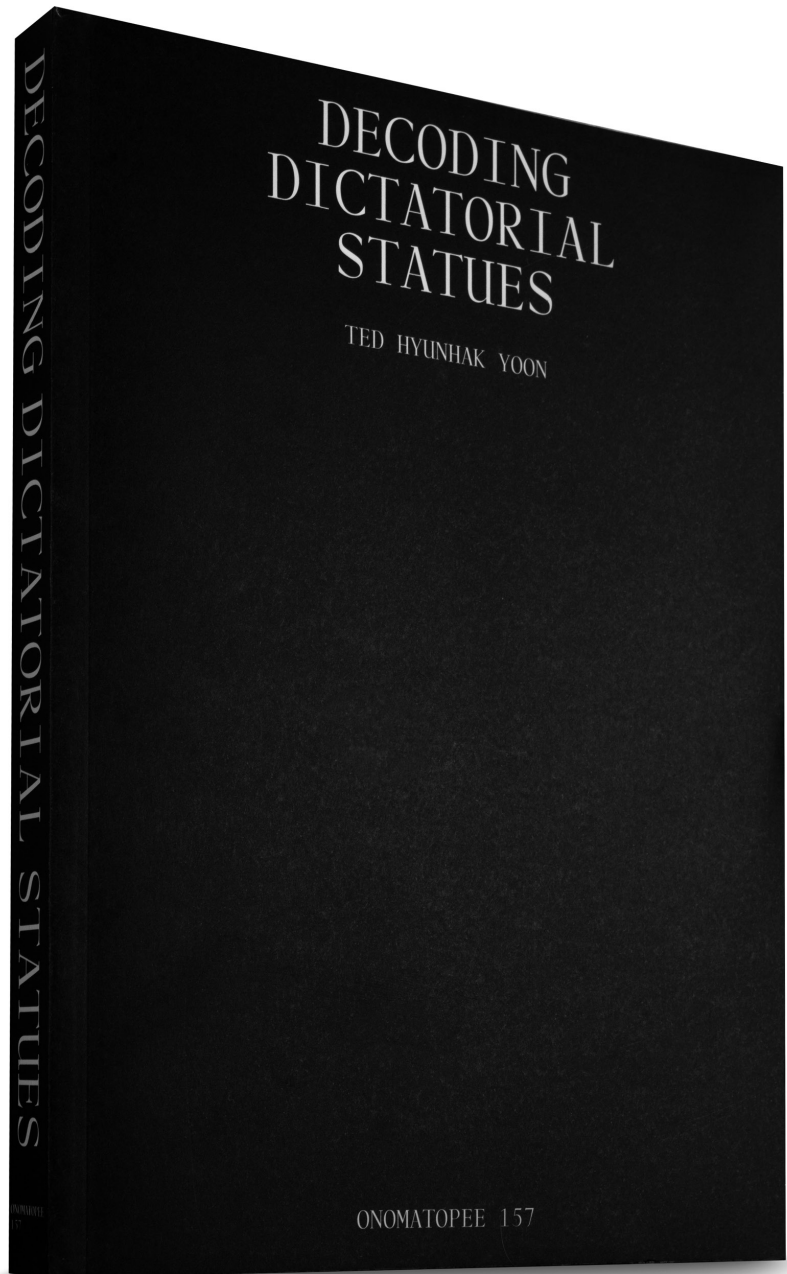
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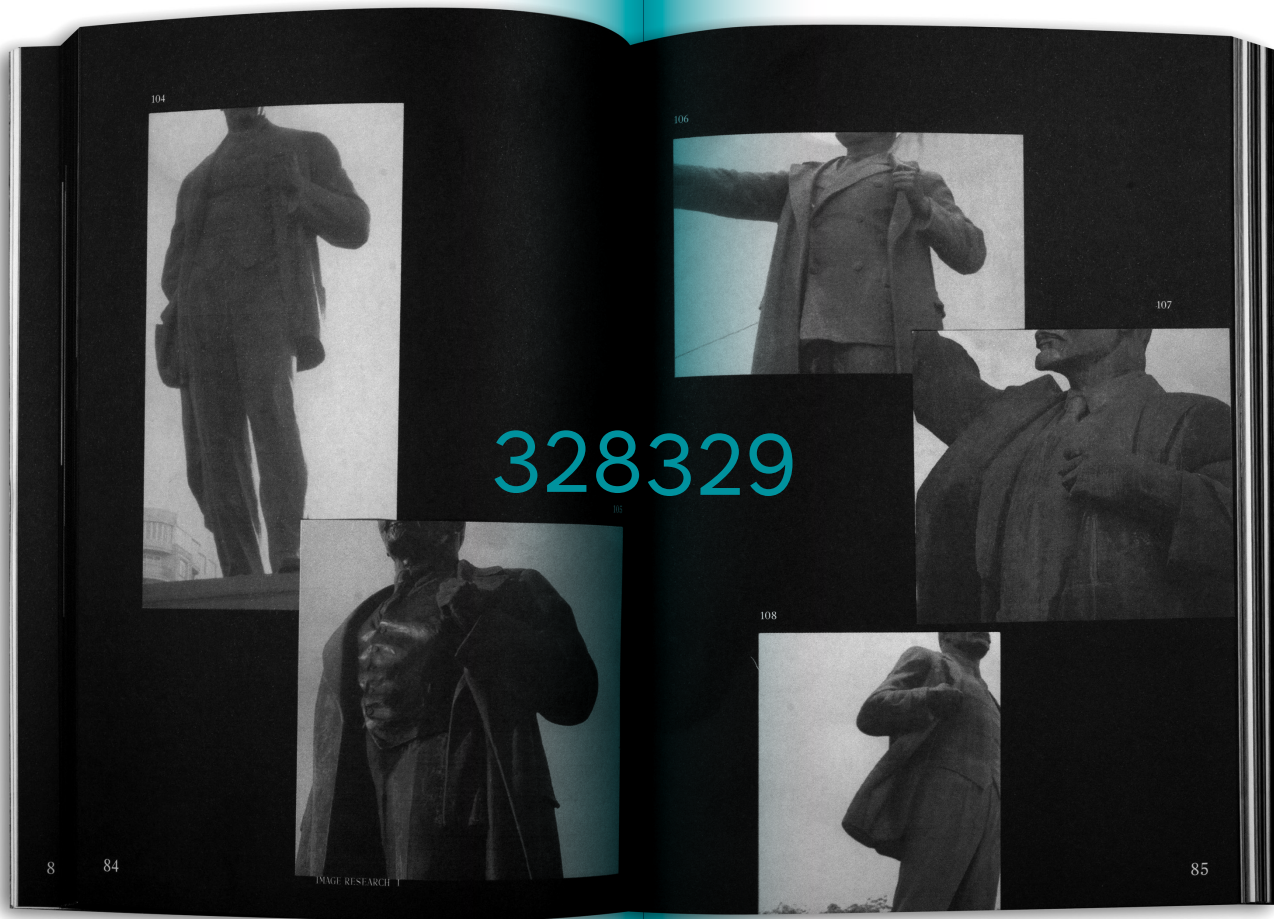
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the Mauritshuis' decision must be viewed in the context of the municipal election campaigns that were running at the time. Politicians adopted strong rhetorics about the protection of history to promote themselves as protectors of Dutch values.

While in South Africa and the United States the public debate concerning colonial and racist heritage is most often initiated by an emancipatory struggle for equality, in the Netherlands the opposite seems to be the case. The bombastic defence of maritime heroes appears to be grounded in white ethnocentrism, and is disproportionate to the modest attempts to create a more inclusive perspective on Dutch history. This is regrettable, as an open debate about those we regard as heroes could lead to a more thoughtful and inclusive approach to Dutch national history. The exaggerated outcries about the "distortion of history" have little to do with a genuine defence against manipulation or subversion, and everything with attempts to create political identities that are not based on ideology or policy, but on racist notions of Dutchness.



Fig. 7
Statue of Prince John Maurice of Nassau-Siegen,
Mauritshuis, The Hague, Netherlands, 2015. Modelled after an
earlier statue by Pieter van Bont, this replica was
placed in the museum foyer in 1987 and
removed in 2017.



Fig. 8
Statue of Prince John Maurice of Nassau-Siegen
(NL) in front of the Palace of Justice, Recife,
Brazil, 2015. The statue is located in front of the
Palace of Justice, which used to be the site of
Fribourg Palace, the office and residence of
Prince John Maurice of Nassau-Siegen.

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Fig. 4. Statue of Robert Edward Lee covered in tarpaulin, Charlottesville, United States, 2017.

DEALING WITH FALLING
HEROES IN SOUTH AFRICA,
THE UNITED STATES AND
THE NETHERLANDS

SOUTH AFRICA

During a conference visit to Bloemfontein in 2015, I let a taxi driver take me to the Anglo-Boer War Museum, or actually, to the Women's Memorial, next to which a museum was established.¹ This visit became a fascinating lesson on the importance of active engagement with symbols and historiography in a country that is attempting to correct extreme racial inequity. The Women's Memorial was erected in commemoration of the Boer women and children who were locked up in British concentration camps during the Boer War. In the Netherlands, the Boers were long considered to be our retarded cousins, and their armed battle with the British in 1880–1881 received little Dutch support. Dutch political opinion shifted, however, when these crude but pious men fought the arrogance of the British Empire a second time in 1899–1902. During this Second Boer War there was much enthusiasm for the Boer cause. Traces of this can still be found in the many Dutch cities that have districts with an Oranje-Vrijstaatplein (Orange Free State Square) or a Kruger or De Wet Street, referring to the Boer Republics and their leaders, who boldly resisted an imperial superpower. After the end of Apartheid a number of these streets in the Netherlands were renamed in honour of heroes of the anti-Apartheid struggle.

In South Africa it was clearly impossible to erase the glorification of the Boers from the streets in such an efficient manner. The taxi driver was a black man raised in Durban, far away from Bloemfontein. The driver was unaware that the Women's Memorial and the museum even existed. He had never taken anyone there. On the way there we spoke of his history education in school. He had attended school in the post-Apartheid era and emphasised that his historical schooling had been focused on black emancipation, the protests against Apartheid and the struggle for equal treatment. He had never learned about the Boer Wars. He did not know these wars were part of national history. Together we walked through the museum garden, passing the monument and then entering the museum. The entrance was draped in Boer pride and the atmosphere of the Apartheid regime, which the Boers had supported and sustained for many years. I sought a reaction from the young driver, but sensed mostly amazement and curiosity.

When, under great societal pressure, the Apartheid regime came to an end, the leaders of the transition committed themselves to the re-establishment of an inclusive South Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation

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IMAGE RESEARCH I

