

### Dieter & Ina Marie

By Jelle Bouwhuis

To briefly summarize Ina Marie Schmidt's presentation: the work is about storytelling, but it's also a story in its own right. It starts off with a family photo album. The man they speak of, Dieter, was found dead on a railroad track one day at the German countryside, this place where people speak a funny dialect. Through four episodes, two men and two women look back at this family member. Each from their own perspective, each from their own recollections. What we see is a very fragmented and unclear picture of Dieter. On the one side, he was an untrustworthy libertine, a crank, even. The other perspective shows admiration, while the women's voices in general reveal a stronger preoccupation with his wife, who committed suicide. In the last episode, told by a woman called Anne, words of admiration for Dieter are alternated with a moment in which she takes a swipe against the 'Nazi-Schweine' (nazi pigs). By then we've already learned that Dieter joined the SS. But perhaps Dieter comes alive best through Wilhelm, who vividly remembers the strong aftershave Dieter used; A brand called TARR, which still exists. His observation makes us almost smell Dieter. But the man remains a mystery. We don't know when he died, or where. Like his family members, we remain puzzled about the exact cause of his death on the railroad track. His life story remains as distant to them as it is to us.

Dieter's story is told from four different perspectives by people who seem to know hardly anything about him. The further we progress through the episodes, the more liberty the speakers take in deviating from their main subject. It also becomes clear that Ina Marie Schmidt, like a real newspaper journalist, takes similar liberties by editing the stories down to just a few minutes of speech. Her goal is not to get the complete picture at any cost. To the contrary; as in many literature or film formats, the multi-perspective is used to keep us in suspense while we wait for the story to unravel and the truth to be revealed. But there is no such thing. Schmidt takes us away from the narrative altogether. She has the four episodes translated into musical compositions and it is these compositions that are performed live for the audience. The ultimate abstraction from a cut-and-clear photographic portrait to a violin play. The story of the work; a story fully in compliance with what cultural theorist Norman



Klein so brilliantly denominated as 'The History of Forgetting'. Klein reminds us of the fact that a history 'as it has happened' does not, and cannot exist. Multiple modes of representing histories stand in its way. For one, the story of Dieter triggers our common conception of the Second World War such as has come to us through novel, film, documentary, and storytelling. An image indeed in which a 'Nazi-Schwein' has become hardly compatible with the image of an admirable man, a descendant even of a well-respected family of inventors and entrepreneurs; or a libertine. The gossip is another strong factor; Wilhelm confesses that most of his knowledge comes from gossip. His recollections are second-hand, so to speak, except for the strong smell of Dieter's aftershave. And what about the portrait picture with which it all started? For a while Schmidt was preoccupied with a device used in the 1840s, the pioneering years of mass portrait photography, to keep the clients' heads straight and still for the many minutes the photographic plates needed light exposure. A portrait in a family album is likewise bound to a device, to a convention: when we see one, we gaze away and muse about 'our history' as if there wouldn't be one without it. At least this was the case for the artist.

In turn, Ina Marie Schmidt forces Dieter's life into a formatted story of her own invention, a story of devices ranging from portrait picture, via the anthropological source documentation in the form of oral histories, all the way to a violin play. A play in which we perhaps, or perhaps not, can discern the faint echo of her family members' voices, which in their turn conjure up the specter of a man whom we, the audience, will hardly know any better than as a picture in someone else's family album. Yet, the violin brings Dieter closer to us and his relative, Ina Marie.

Jelle Bouwhuis is curator of the SMBA, the project space of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.



### On location

#### Stille Post

Performance, 2012.

Musical composition in four parts. The composition is based on stories of family history. By performing, musicians translate the stories into sound, and through their interpretation the stories are added to, changed.

Gabey Tjon A Tham – Violin

Thanasis Deligiannis – Vocals

### On-line

#### Family Matters

Video (audio track with English subtitles), 15:21, 2012.

A story on the ambiguity of perception and remembering.

During the opening of the graduation exhibition, the full, four-part video will be launched at:

[www.inamarieschmidt.com](http://www.inamarieschmidt.com)

#### Körperhalter

Ink drawing, 20cm by 30cm, 2012.

Depicted is a head and body-rest dating from the 1850s.

Imagine, if you will, entering an unknown room. The space looks like a glass house. Light comes in through the large glass ceiling and the windows in the left side of the building. There is an acrid, acid smell of chemicals. It itches in your mouth and eyes. Try not to breathe too deeply. The room is sparsely furnished, yet contains an odd collection of curtains and what seem like theater props. You sit down in a sort of dentist's chair. Your head and body are put into metal clamps, keeping your pose fixed.

'...a self-contained capsule where all notions of time and space disappear.'

Jean Sagne

Thanks to David Bernstein for proof-reading and Mark Lindhout for designing this flyer.

