

AN ARTIST AMONG THE SCIENTISTS

Desire to downsize

Artist Arne Hendriks is spending a year and a half among the researchers on the Wageningen campus. As artist in residence, he wants to help scientists by looking at the protein transition through a different lens.

TEXT ANJA JANSSEN PHOTO PETER LIPTON

Arne Hendriks enjoys a big challenge. Like the transformation that human beings must go through as a species to restore balance in their relationship with the planet. 'How we are going to produce our food is possibly the most important chapter in the book on that transformation. And within that, the transition to different sources of protein is hugely important,' says Hendriks. The artist is in his element in Wageningen. 'Here, one big narrative is being written: everyone who works here has connected in one way or another with stories about us as a species, and about how we relate to food. Every day, thousands of incredibly dedicated people contribute to those stories. To me, that is really inspiring. And it could be really inspiring for everyone. Actually I would love everyone to be able to spend a period in residence at WUR.' Since September 2019, Hendriks has spent two days a week on the campus, helping scientists to take a look at the transition to a more plant-based diet through a different

lens. At Hendriks' request, we meet in an indoor garden on the campus. 'The surroundings affect how you feel, how you talk and how you think,' he says. That is why he is thinking about creating a Diego Rivera-like mural somewhere on the campus, to portray the past, the present and the future of the protein transition. 'Murals are much more than pictures. They represent a space for thinking that can go on providing inspiration for a long time.' But Hendriks's main artistic expression on

the campus takes the form of stories, ideas, presentations, encounters and, hopefully, inspiration. 'Sometimes all I do is to create space for other people to shine or to meet each other.'

Hendriks is fascinated by the human craving for abundance. By way of illustration, he brings out a pile of postcards. They are 'exaggeration cards', showing giant bunches of grapes, apples, melons or fish. 'I can look at them for hours. To me, these cards are a splendid visualization of our deep-rooted longing for abundance, and the promise that everything is going to be all right. That promise of abundance is very much alive in Wageningen. But we have come to realize that the promise is not for ever. I find it very interesting to see how on the one hand, we as a species go off the rails – because of that longing – and how, on the other hand, we have the capacity to gain new insights and to act on them.'

As a counterbalance to the craving for growth, Hendriks studies all things small, and the desire to downsize. In this context,

**'I create space
for investigation'**



The Incredible Shrinking Man is a key figure in Arne Hendriks' work.

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Arne Hendriks (1971) has an 18-month posting as artist in residence at Wageningen University & Research for two days a week. WUR contributes to the costs of this project, which also receives funding from the DOEN Foundation of the Dutch Charity Lotteries. University Fund Wageningen brokered that contribution. The Fund sees the project as important because Hendriks can offer scientists a whole new perspective on the theme of the protein transition, says public relations officer Fusien Verloop. 'And he can bring people together in a playful fashion.'

he launched The Incredible Shrinking Man project 10 years ago. 'This is the crux of my work, in a way. The Shrinking Man is based on the naïve idea that we human beings need to become smaller, because then we won't need to consume as much and we'll be more capable of living in balance with the planet. We can shrink that so passionately desired abundance.'

Hendriks brought The Shrinking Man along to Wageningen. 'It is the lens I use to look for the small, for less, for downsizing. That might be a very practical example of smaller cows instead of large cows, or of algae instead of lettuce, but it is also about our obsession with growth and how we can aspire to less rather than more.'

CHICKETARIAN

Hendriks also introduced eight characters with their own visions about our trajectory as a species. He aims to use these characters to collate and examine the narratives about the protein transition. There is the 'oceanic farmer', for instance, who farms seaweed and algae at sea, while the 'chicketarian' believes a visit to Kentucky Fried Chicken can save the world.

For a while now, he's been walking around the campus with pictures of these characters, and asking people to comment on them. He calls this a job application procedure, to see whether the characters are capable of doing their jobs. 'I thought it would be thought-provoking to invite these kinds of speculative figures into a research context.'

In all the discussions and encounters of his first six months, Hendriks felt 'incredibly welcome'. 'When you are doing scientific research these days, there is not much room for stepping outside your own straight lines, whereas scientists are generally very creative people. I try to provide a creative space they can step into, and where we can collaborate. The main aim is of course the transformation. But a transformation starts with having the space to take steps.' ■