

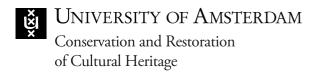
Sample transcript of interview data

General information of the interview

Title	Interview Eva Gonggrijp on <i>Grenzeloze Inhoud</i>
Interviewee	Eva Gonggrijp (E.G.), 16-05-1960
Interviewer	Marie Ducimetière (M.D.), contemporary art conservation MA student at UvA
Others present	Anthi Soulioti (A.S.), contemporary art conservation MA student at UvA
Place	Studio WG11, M.v.B. Bastiaansestraat 11, Amsterdam
Time	05-03-2020. 01:30:00
Keywords	Conservering en Restauratie van Cultureel Erfgoed; Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage; Grenzeloze Inhoud; Verhalen uit een Bagagedepot; Mondelinge Geschiedenis; Oral History; Kunstwerk; Artwork; Conservering; Conservation; Restauratie; Restoration; Materialen en Technieken; Materials and Techniques; Maakproces; Making Process; Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst (RBK); Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands; Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed (RCE); Rijkscollectie; State Collection; De Reis; John den Besten; Kunstenaarsinterview; Artist Interview; Hedendaagse Kunst; Contemporary Art; BK-informatie; Nederlandse Kunst Stichting; Koffer; Suitcase; Plastics; Reizende tentoonstelling; Traveling exhibition; Universiteit van Amsterdam; University of Amsterdam; Poetry; Michael Gibbs; Words; William Burroughts; John Klinkenberg
Summary	Michael Gibbs took part in the project "Traveling exhibition" in 1983. He decided to perforate the suitcase designed by John den Besten with bullets. Unfortunately, the artist passed away in 2007. This interview is with Eva Gonggrijp, his widow. She describes in more detail the philosophy behind Michael Gibbs' art.
Recording	Video recording with a Sony FDR-AX53 4K, hand held by Anthi Soulioti (A.S.)
Transcript*	Marie Ducimetière
Owner of the document	Marie Ducimetière, University of Amsterdam
Language	English

*

- "Eh's and Ehms'" are left out to enhance readability.
- [...] = clarifications, additions, titles in *italics*.
- [...] = short in between reactions of the other. Sometimes completely left out.



Setting

Part 1 of the interview takes place in a quiet room at a table, in a local where some artworks from Michael Gibbs are kept. There are books and archival material available on tables behind us. The first exchange consists of a series of questions-answers to contextualize and clarify the work and learn more about the artist's mindset.

Part 2 of the interview consist on the exploration of the archival material that Eva Gonggrijp brought for us. We can see catalogues, books, pictures and brochure of the artist's work. This is based on the 3 sections of video recording made during the interview, the audio recording wasn't functioning anymore.

Transcript - Part 1

00:00:00

M.D.: Let's contextualise. We are the 5th March, in Amsterdam and you are Eva Gonggrijp-

E.G.: Eva Gonggrijp Gibbs.

M.D.: Yes, Michael Gibbs' widow and we are doing an interview for UvA. I will just contextualize a little bit the artwork for you, to have a reminder of what we're talking about: In 1983, the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Culture decided to set up a "traveling exhibition". Michael Gibbs' project was selected over 100 suitcases. He decided to present an empty suitcase whose walls made of plastic were perforated by bullets. After 25 years in their storage, the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed (RCE) decided to hand over the suitcases to the Universiteit van Amsterdam in order to carry out a complete condition report and treatment proposal for each of them. And that is the suitcase I'm currently working on. So first of all can I Ask you to introduce yourself?

E.G.: Yeah, sure. I was Michael Gibb's wife, we met in end 90's. I'm his second wife. He married before and he got two sons of this marriage. I met him in late 90's and actually after a few months we got to live together and I moved out to Amsterdam, I lived in Arnhem... And we got married, and we got... I had already a child and we got a baby together, a girl.... And yeah, we lived together for 10 years and unfortunately, he got very ill and passed away so... We had a... we had a very intense period because of that of course but also because he was ill for a few years already so... Yeah! I'm an artist myself and I started to actually work on his archive in 2016 because we decided to make an exhibition. It was worth it but... he stored his work in this space, upstairs, and little boxes because the old works were not massively big. They were bigger works in frame but that was behind the garden, there are still a lot because we only did his archive until 1984. And the archive after the exhibitions is bought by an institution who is now doing research on it in New-York. So it's all gone but fortunately I have a lot of publication and I have an online archive as well so it's all his writing and photograph of his works, publications and... but yeah, now maybe you want to put questions or I can continue talking, whatever you want..

M.D.: Feel free to talk if you...

E.G.: So I didn't know a lot about this work I knew about his later work and he was... I think in the end his main function was art critic so he started up an internet critical platform in 1994 just after the internet was invented by my brother [laughter] I think he felt in love with me because of the... my brother [laughter] Because he was so... yeah... But we didn't know each other then so then so it's pure coincidence that we met.

00:04:50

M.D.: And do you remember anything about project... Like... the suitcase?

E.G.: I remember him telling me in a kind of funny way because he really liked the action which was part of the project because... Well... You have to know a little bit of the background of his work, why he used an empty suitcase. Because Michael he got that blank books, he had a whole collection of blank books of several artists, lot of artists who made books as an object, as an artwork and so they were kind of blank but there was still a meaning in it and Michael was a text artist and in the beginning... I mean he studied literature. While working with text he started very early with publications and with William Burroughts' cut up things and I think the spaces between words became as important as the words itself and the spaces became bigger and bigger. So that's the connection with, you know, his other works like... this empty things. It still has a meaning. So he went with this suitcase to a place where you learn shooting and he first had to learn how to hold a gun and then he made the holes himself by shooting and he really enjoyed that because the way he told that it was like "Héhé I did that" [laughter] and there is always a kind of strange humour underlaying like... yeah. But he was British, it's difficult to explain. He was a very laid-back person and when you met him, he was very relax, very gentle, very nice... really nice person. But he could be really sharp in his way of looking at art. He didn't like painting [laughter] just in general. When he had to write about painting people were not happy. [ok] You know, as an art critic. He also taught in Design Academy in Eindhoven in image culture but then he was Asked for art history and he started with now, and then got back in history until Marcel Duchamp and that was it. Before that it was not in its... [interest...?] No, totally [laughing]. Yes, he was very specific in what he liked or not. He thought art critic was a very important thing you know. The being of art in society and also cultural history was very much... When you see his library, it was a lot of cultural luggage in its books. So, he was very... you know -

00:08:30

M.D.: He was a poet too.

E.G.: Yes! I mean, he was an official poet and he actually invented term... Well, first, language art and then he made it "languart" ['længwɪ a:t] so that was a kind of term. So yes, a lot of artist were working with concrete poetry and I can show you some examples later on... I mean, I don't know if you know this kind of material [M.D. nodding] but then he didn't really appreciate the decorative aspect of it and then he started to fuck around with text especially books were a kind of fetish for him so he did a lot of performances with books, with texts, losing words, mixing up words. I digitalized... We digitalized lot of tapes, you know the old fashion tapes where he also made sound poetry together with people like Ulises Carrion and Greta Monarch so it was very experimental and he worked in layers so there is one layer, another layer upon it and very analogue I mean now you can do it very easily with a computer but he did it totally analogue,

you know, by putting back the tape again and then started over with recording. So it was kind of random as well. But, yes, I mean, I really liked this work so for me it was a new meeting with young Michael when I discovered all his works because I didn't know it, he didn't introduce me to it. Fortunately, I met someone on the way, and he was already working at Michael's archives for a couple of years and he did hell of a lot of research and he is like in our temporary of Michael. He knew everything. It was a really big help for me to categorize and to set out the exhibition which we did together. But this is only its old work and I mean the suitcase is from 1982 and he started out working really different, so I think installation became more important, so this is actually a kind of installation. And also, the images next to the text and the contradiction between both so the friction between what you see and what you get. I think... there is a kind of space in between which you really want to explore. Then the work became much more bigger in the installation form, and different. And then he discovered the digital world which was another treasure for him. You have to think about... just the beginning it took hell of a lot of time to just log in and all the beeps and you had to connect ad took ages before you had the screens and that's also... I mean, programming is also a language. So he made himself the htlm codes by hand and he programmed it like a language in his computer. And yes, he started up to do websites and he discovered internet artists like Jodi. And it's still exiting this... I don't know if you saw it? [no] I can give you some links1 and you can... We don't change it because it's very charming the way it is. I mean you can make it much more advance, but I think we should keep like it was.

00:13:10

- M.D.: Yes, definitely. There was a catalogue for this exhibition and in this catalogue, there was a description of Michael's work and the words used are: "The image conjures up fear, associations with war situations, in which the traveler who gets caught up in them runs great risks.". Is there in your knowledge a link between war and the bullet holes?
- E.G.: He didn't tell me about it. But that was in the catalogue, that must have been his own text. And also, he saw what was going on. He's not a war victim or something, he didn't really experienced war from the inside but of course he knew what was going on and he was very concerned about things happening so if this was in the catalogue it must have been his motives to do so. I think also you find a motive... It also works the other way around if you empty things you are going to start by motives that are going to make the things more empty than they are already. So it always works like that I think. This was the only thing..?
- M.D.: In the catalogue? [yes] No! But I can show it to you because there is a lot in Dutch.
- E.G.: I did have a lot of publications and catalogues, but I can't remember this one.
- M.D.: It was a really tiny one. Like tiny texts under each image but I will show it to you. So I translated it from the Dutch, so it is approximative but it was written: "At the exhibition there is a suitcase, completely empty, shot by five bullets. What was in that suitcase? What happened? Where Gibbs lets go of his trusted material, dramatic events take place. The image conjures up fear, associations with war situations, in which the traveller who gets caught up in them runs great

¹ https://nondes.home.xs4all.nl/

Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage

risks". But I think this was a description from the conservator or the people who made the exhibition because it was not in...

E.G.: Knowing Michael he would have definitely provided his own text he would type a better text [laughter]

M.D.: Like a good description of his own work? [yes] Perhaps I can show you now a picture of the suitcase.

E.G.: I think I have some pictures of it but I would love to see it.

00:16:15

M.D.: This is a picture of 1983. [Showing the picture below]. So the original appearance [Eva is nodding]



Figure 1 Tours 1983, photo by Hogers / Versluys, 1983

M.D.: This is a picture we have from 2000. [Showing the picture below.]



Figure 2 Tours 1983, Figure 3 Tours 1983, photo by A. Lorne, 2000

E.G.: [laughter] That was time does!

M.D.: Yes! So you can see that there are two main issues which are first, the yellowing of the plastic sheets [yes] but we can not really do anything about it. But it is still transparent so it's not that bad. [yes] But there is also the handle of the suitcase that broke between 1983 and 2000. And today, it looks like this. [Showing the picture below] So this is the actual condition.

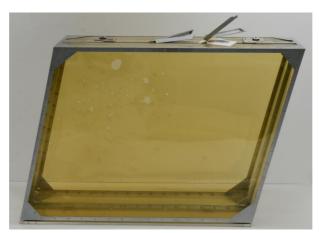


Figure 4 Tours 1983, photo by M. Ducimetière, 2019

E.G.: And the handle here is still broken?

M.D.: It is still broken.

E.G.: And I understand that it is now in Rijksmuseum?

M.D.: In the studio belonging to the Rijksmuseum, but it's really like five minutes from here. And it is in "our studio" so to say, so the contemporary art studio where we are treating it.

E.G.: So you are actually doing the restoration?

M.D.: I am.

E.G.: [Pointing at Anthi] And you too? [Anthi shaking no] That's so nice!

M.D.: Yes because we have 12 suitcases and we are 5 students so each students is working on 2 or 3 suitcases [yes] and that's "mine".

E.G.: I'm very curious John Klinkenberg is in Can you check it for me?

M.D.: He is for sur not part of the 12 artists.

E.G.: Ok. I will ask him to get in touch with you.

M.D.: Yes please, might be really great. [Both looking back to the picture]

E.G.: But on the other hand, I really like it. I mean, the yellow. Because that's what happen in time. I mean his publication also became yellow and a lot of works you know, also kind of attached. But it really makes them more...

M.D.: Authentic?

E.G.: Yes, beautiful. It is just when things are going to really fall apart then you have a problem.

00:18:58

M.D.: It's not the case here. Do you know what Michael would think about this degradation process.?

E.G.: [Thinking] I think he liked the original colour more. Of course. But Michael was not the kind of person who would battle against these kinds of things. I mean, he was not the one looking back, he was always busy with new developments. He was very happy with his works and period he had, but never sentimental about it. That was like "Yeah, it has been, now I'm doing other things". Even... "I've done my thing" a little bit. Because he needed his energy just to survive. So he was really much... I think... In acceptance. But he would be really happy to know that people are taking care of his work.

M.D.: We are!

E.G.: Yes, and it's fantastic. You can't do a lot about colour?

M.D.: Colour, no. It's irreversible, unfortunately. But we can definitely do something about the handle.

[yes] What you need to know is that one part is missing, the upper part. There was a metallic part here so to treat the object I'd like to put it back in its original shape and re create a mock-up. So it would not be fully the original artwork anymore.

- E.G.: No, but that's what happens with restoration. I mean, if you put another layer of paint on a thing that is, you know, damage. Then it's also not the original work but you try to reproduce the original work as good as you can.
- M.D.: Here it would be more for the visual effect of the suitcase. Because it's already empty, if we leave the handle broken, it attracts the eye really fast. So yes, I think it would be a good idea to treat it.
- E.G.: Yes! And there are people who can reproduce that... I think.
- M.D.: Yes! We can work with the metal conservators of UvA. I'm already in touch with them. [yes] It will work.
- E.G.: I'm sure he would be really happy to know that someone is taking care of his work. Do you have any idea of what will happen to it afterwards?
- M.D.: The goal is to put into an exhibition again, I think around September or November of next year. And if this doesn't happen, they are going to go back in the RCE storages. Waiting for a new exhibition to happen.
- E.G.: Nice.
- M.D.: I'm in contact with Simone, who was supposed to be there today but unfortunately, she's sick.
- E.G.: Simone of the RCE?
- M.D.: Yes. And she told me that you could exchange emails with her if you have any additional question on where the suitcases are going to go after all. Because in August, even in July, we don't have them anymore.
- E.G.: I would love to know, when there is an exhibition.
- M.D.: You are also really close so if you want to come, to see the artwork in the studio.
- E.G.: Maybe I take my daughter! And it would be really nice.
- M.D.: Totally. She could join. [If possible] It is. We will just exchange emails to you can see in real life...
- E.G.: Also it is nice to see the working space, where you work. So the main goal with the education

you are doing is restoration? It is really nice.

M.D.: Yes. Conservation restoration.

E.G.: It is very important.

00:23:53

M.D.: I still have a few questions. I saw on the website that it was "M.R. Gibbs". What does the R stands for?

E.G.: Roger.

M.D.: I was just wondering this. Michael Roger Gibbs. Have you any knowledge of him working with guns? On other projects than this one?

E.G.: [laughing] Only water guns with his daughter. No. He was truly not a violent person, but I think I find it really cool to use one. I'm sure. Because I remember him telling it like with his smile on his face [laughing]

M.D.: Did he know where the suitcase went after he made it?

E.G.: Probably, I mean he knew it was going to be a traveling exhibition [yes].

M.D.: You said earlier that he made the suitcase. But did he travel with it or just took it to the shooting place to shut?

E.G.: I can't be 100% sure but I can't imagine him travelling randomly with an empty suitcase but that would be very funny. [it would] I mean, he definitely travelled to the shooting place so... At leASt he must have done it once. But maybe he covered it or.... But these things I don't know for sure because we weren't together already then.

M.D.: That's alright.

E.G.: But knowing him, I don't think he travelled that much with the suitcase. Because it could damage easily the plastic.

M.D.: Yes. And I think three of the other suitcases we are working on went a trip alone, around the world. And one artist travelled to Egypt and brought back some stuff to put it into the suitcase so it was really one purpose of this "travelling exhibition".

E.G.: Ah. I'll check John about it. Because he also was very impressed by the work and he probably knows more about this than I do.

M.D.: We could ASk him.

E.G.: Yes.

M.D.: Well you answered all the questions I had, thank you. Perhaps we can have a look to all the materials you put on the tables for us [Michael Gibbs' work].

Transcript - Part 2

Section 1

E.G.: They also made a sound capturing together and it's just published two years ago. He organised sound poetry festivals, this was in Stedeleijk. And then he also made a publication of it.

This is him! [laughter] I think. Yeah, Michael Gibbs [laughter] I mean when I met him he was grey, and almost no hair anymore.

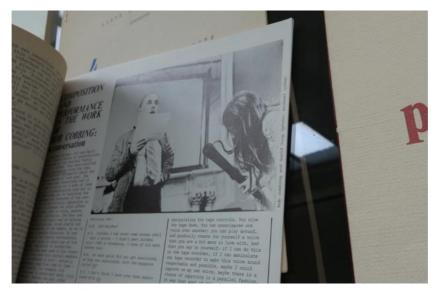


Figure 5 In "Kontextsound", Bob Cobbing and David Toop (photo: Michael Gibbs)

[taking another catalogue] This was also a travelling to America where he met these artists and wrote about it. [showing the artists' name on the back of the catalogue] And there is a lot of famous artists... Anna Banana. So he published a lot of people as well besides his own works. It has all to do with text, you know.



Figure 6 Name of artists who have met Michael Gibbs

- M.D.: Yes, it is interesting to see that he was using a lot of texts and poems and that for the suitcase, it is only visual.
- E.G.: Yeah, but it really connects with.... Here [taking a white book]. He wrote an anthology of blank books with blank ink [laughter] But here is also... Oh, this is also with blank ink, because I also have it with black ink.

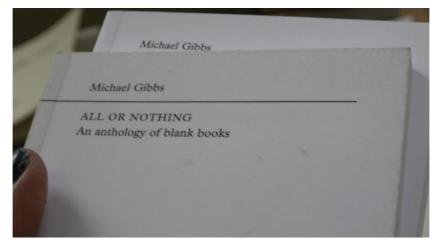


Figure 7 "All or nothing - An anthology of blank books" by Michael Gibbs

Section 2

- E.G.: It is one of his last works. Actually, this is a cassette, and this is one of the three things... This is "Somevolumesfrom Thelibraryfabel", it's a text without white space, almost.
- M.D.: So this was 20 years after the creation of the suitcase?
- E.G.: Yeah, well... But I think he wrote the texts earlier. But maybe to get an idea... This is his later documentation [flipping through the pages of another book] So this work, I still have. It's like... one meter and the whole installation is seven meters.



Figure 8 "DAS leere der Schöpfung"

This is "Re-enactment" of the Russian revolution which he captured. He cut it up in twelve pieces. So that's a whole wall when you hang it.

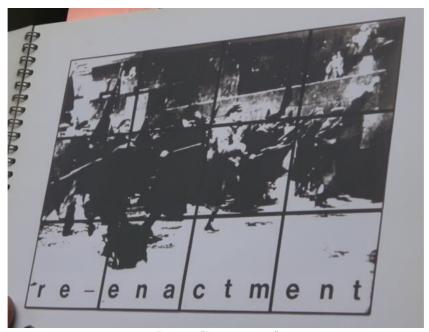


Figure 9 "Re-enactment"

He was working with texts, and images, and the space between the text and the image. It has a lot to do with the spaces in between the meaning. Actually this is an empty "socle". This is the basement of a sculpture but there is no sculpture on it.

- M.D.: Ok, interesting. And was he often interested in what was going on in the world, because here we have the Russian revolution and...
- E.G.: Yes he went to Russia, he made a whole travel to St Petersburg and he was very involved in what happened. He became more and more political. Also with the whole issue of privacy. So he had a kind of a hang up with shopping malls and alienation in the environment.



Figure 10 "Living debt ... Dead credit"

This is something else... "Art Creates Society", Museum of Modern Art. He was more and more interested in art and cultural meaning.

"Turn of the century", so here is the shopping mall [pointing at the two black and white pictures]

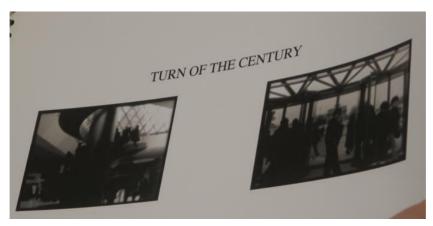


Figure 11 "Turn of the century"

And he reassembled old images. This is like the victorious version youth and he captures it. And it's also an installation. I like this work very much. And the text is just on the wall.



Figure 12 "Corpus"

M.D.: So that was when he was already in Amsterdam?

E.G.: Yes. I mean... He was in Amsterdam from... I mean he started at the Jan van Eyck Academie as an artist in residence and he teach there young students as well. And then he met the international scene and moved out to Amsterdam first temporarily. But then he wanted to stay, and there was a very good art climb at this time. I mean, at the time you had BKR... If you were recognized as an artist you got very good conditions. So that's why the arts which was made during this period was so experimental because they didn't have to sell their works. Times have changed. Nowadays as an artist you have to be kind of a business. model.

M.D.: It's indeed complicated.

E.G.: Right. [She takes a binder] This is even a bit earlier. So this is the period in between. [whispering] This is just documentation... Elements of an installation....

"Workdbackwards", 1986. This was also in Russia. He wrote on a glass. with a red ink, and then there is a black and white image behind it. Very nice work, I like it.

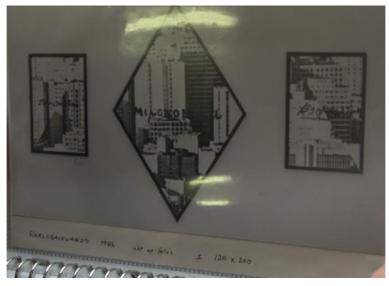


Figure 13 "Woldbackwards 1986. Inkt op foto's +- 120 x 200"

M.D.: Did he have any connections with Russia or was he just interested in it?

E.G.: Yeah, he was interested in the Russia... Like... All the Aspects of the revolution and communism also afterwards. Also what happened with arts because... There were some people who were script out of History. Like literally, painted black on pictures so that really triggered in... [showing another picture] So this is the Russian, also.... I have all these works though.

M.D.: Oh! It's all here, in the studio?

E.G.: Yes, it's behind the black curtain and upstairs.

M.D.: [showing a picture] This is the same year as the suitcase!

of Cultural Heritage



Figure 14 "Zonder titel, 1983 fotowerk (op linnen) 2-delig. 140 x 100 cm"

E.G.: Yes, so this is the same period. And also with materials, he was experimenting... This glass., with the sunscreen, which is half transparent. Yes he liked the Plexiglas. I also had a work, but that's now in another place, with a cut up really nice, with a text... And part of a book, like waves, and falling out of it, and glued all over the pages. It's called "poem of the sea" and it's in a Plexiglas box, I could show you. So here you can see the blank pages and the letters falling out of the book, of the text... And this is part of an exhibition he had. I should have more documentation on that... I actually don't know where now. Oh! I know, maybe... [looking around] No... That's stupid.



Figure 15 "Poem of the sea"

Section 3

M.D.: I see here the catalogue of the exhibition!

E.G.: This one? [Pointing at another catalogue]

M.D.: This one! [Pointing at Grenzeloze inhoud] That's the catalogue, and you have it!

E.G.: Tadam! [She opens the catalogue] This is also...

M.D.: No this is from... So each artist...

E.G.: But he has also a transparent... And he as a smaller suitcase in it!

M.D.: Yes, and pigments.

E.G.: That's so nice!

M.D.: This is really nice, yes. So one designer designed the suitcase and...

E.G.: Oh they all had the same suitcase! [Yes] Now I understand.

M.D.: John den Besten is the one who designed the suitcases and after that, 12 artists had to...

E.G.: Ahaaa! Ok, so this is Michael!

M.D.: And this is the dutch text.

E.G.: Yes! [reading the text under the picture of *Tour 1983* in the catalogue, nodding] Yes... Yes. [flipping the pages] But it's so strange that I don't see the work of John... Maybe... These are the 12 suitcases? And they are all still there?

M.D.: Yes.

E.G.: So nice...

M.D.: Perhaps John is in the...

E.G.: And they are all yellow?

M.D.: They are all yellow. [Oh.] But the same yellow! They are in a pretty good condition. I'm now thinking... But no, they are all in a pretty good condition.

AS: Not mine!

M.D.: Not yours, ok. One was attack by little bugs, but the other ones are in quite a good conservation state. Perhaps John is in the list of persons who helped for the travelling exhibition?

E.G.: But here I see.

- M.D.: This is Erica's suitcase. This is not the [final] picture of the suitcase. This is now full a little object from all over the world. And in 1983, this was not done yet. [going back to Michael's page in the catalogue] I think this is something he said.
- E.G.: [laughter] Yeah, ok, so this is very concrete.
- M.D.: Yes. It looks like he travelled.
- E.G.: No, yeah, well he did travel to some places but totally not to Cambodia, and Kenya and Guatemala. So it's kind of a strange humour. Like a text for a travelling catalogue. "Go to Guatemala, explore..." You know. "Experience the splendour of Afghanistan, enjoy peaceful Corsica" so it's very cynical.
- M.D.: Yes and these are all places where there were wars.... Still are. [Yes] Do you think there is a link with the bullet holes?
- E.G.: Yes, totally yes. So it's like heat your hearts out, go to these areas and this is what you can expect. So it's a bit cynical. I'm sure he liked to do the bullets, so there's also another side.
- M.D.: Yeah like positive side, and...
- E.G.: Well also I think there is a kind of underlaying humour in all the sadness. of course, to communicate. Because he was concerned, with all that was happening, but you can't do much... except visualizing things and tying to communicate.
- M.D.: Telling the World.
- E.G.: Yes, but then in indirect ways.
- M.D.: It's really nice, it's really powerful. [Yes] Because it's one if the... It's actually the only empty suitcase.
- E.G.: Very minimalistic. But I think this work [showing "Poem of the sea"] is really close to this one [pointing at the suitcase].
- M.D.: And this one was made in 2000 you said?
- E.G.: No no, this one... beginning of the 80's I think. But I have to check that. And the work is the photo. So yes, I still have it. But there are also the slides so you can enlarge it. But this was part of an installation. I have a blackout. Not the lost words but... I have a blackout. This is the whole research of his colleague so it's definitely in here. It's all in dutch. [looking into a green folder] I can send it to you. But I wanted to show you more images.
- M.D.: So he was working with a lot of artists?
- E.G.: Yes. I think... Not the same size, but you can compare it a little bit with "sasi collab" who was, you know, publisher. And also you know a few of the same people were... But it's own work was very invisible for a long time. So that's why we worked on these exhibitions.

M.D.: Was he working on his own works alone?

E.G.: Sometimes together with his ex. Because that work... I think... [video stops there]