

Thirza Schaap

portfolio.

**Berman
Contemporary
All Women Art
V&A Waterfront**



THIRZA SCHAAP PRACTICE

Thirza Schaap's photographic practice examines the entangled relationship between beauty, consumption, and environmental consequence. Working primarily with discarded materials collected from shorelines, she considers what persists after consumption and how aesthetic transformation can alter the way we encounter it. What the sea returns to shore becomes both material and subject.

The act of collecting is central to Schaap's methodology. Fragments of plastic, discarded bottles, and objects weathered by salt, sunlight and time are removed from the shoreline and brought into the studio. Here, they are selected, arranged and constructed into sculptural compositions before being photographed. This movement, from found material to constructed object to photographic image, places her work between the familiar and the strange, between attraction and unease.

Schaap's photographic language is informed both by the tradition of still life and her early career in commercial photography where she developed a meticulous understanding of styling, colour, composition and the seductive potential of the image. In her artistic practice, those mechanisms are redirected. The visual language traditionally used to make objects desirable is turned towards consumption's debris. Beauty becomes not an end, but a means of drawing the viewer towards a material reality that might otherwise be overlooked.

Her photographs can be read as contemporary vanitas: compositions concerned with excess, material consequence, and the passage of time. Yet, where the historical vanitas points towards transience and decay, the synthetic materials in Schaap's images resist disappearance. Plastic persists. The objects she collects bear evidence of a prolonged encounter between the synthetic and the natural, accumulating, fragmenting and circulating through the ocean before returning to shore.

Beauty in Schaap's work is therefore never neutral. As she describes it, "When ugliness is disguised with beauty, it enters the mind through another door." Her work holds seduction and discomfort in deliberate tension – asking what happens when waste is made desirable – and how looking might change once the material reality of the image becomes apparent. At its centre is an increasingly complicated relationship with the natural world: what we feed it, what it absorbs, and what it returns to us.

BIOGRAPHY

Thirza Schaap (b. 1971, the Netherlands) lives and works between Amsterdam and Cape Town. She graduated from the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague in 1996 and began her career in commercial photography. Her work has since been exhibited internationally, including solo exhibitions at Christie's Amsterdam, Bildhalle Amsterdam and Fabrica Research Centre in Venice. In 2022, she was invited as a special guest to the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in London. Her work has been widely published in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Vogue*, *Elle*, *L'Officiel*, *Aperture* and *i-D*.

In 2026, Schaap presented two solo exhibitions in South Africa: *Fatal Flowers* at Candice Berman Gallery in Johannesburg, featuring a new body of paintings, and *After the Tide* at Berman Contemporary in Cape Town. *After the Tide* presented photographs from her ongoing *Plastic Ocean* series alongside a selection of the sculptural arrangements from which the images emerge, making visible the processes of selection, construction and composition that underpin her photographic practice.

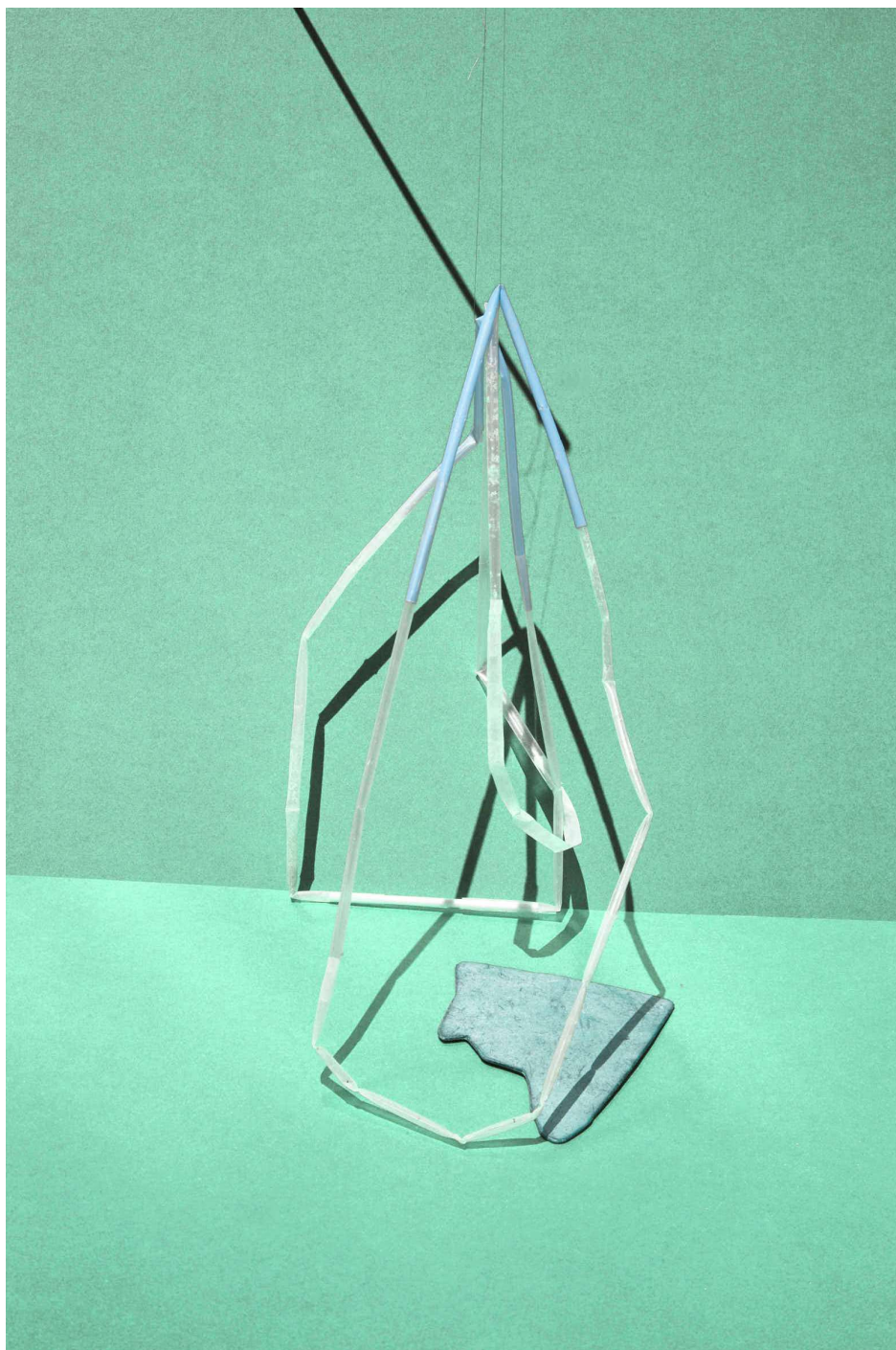
Schaap's first monograph, *Plastic Ocean*, was published in 2021. That same year, she received the Inspiration Award from Hedy d'Ancona and the Dutch Humanistic Association.

Thirza Schaap is represented by Berman Contemporary.

Instagram @thirzaschaap
Website thirzaschaap.com



Illusion, 2017
Archival inkjet print on Felix Schoeller, adhered to diabond
30 x 20 cm
Edition of 7



Chapel, 2019
Archival inkjet print on Felix Schoeller, adhered to diabond
30 x 20 cm
Edition of 7



After the Tide, 2026
Installation view, Berman Contemporary, Cape Town



Vanity, 2020
Archival inkjet print on Felix Schoeller, adhered to diabond
50 x 75 cm
Edition of 7



After the Tide, 2026
Installation view, Berman Contemporary, Cape Town



Hydra, 2019
Archival inkjet print on Felix
Schoeller, adhered to diabond
75 x 50 cm
Edition of 7



Cumulus, 2019
Archival inkjet print on Felix
Schoeller, adhered to diabond
75 x 50 cm
Edition of 7



White King, 2019
Archival inkjet print on Felix
Schoeller, adhered to diabond
75 x 50 cm
Edition of 7



Half Moon, 2026
Archival inkjet print on Felix Schoeller, adhered to
diabond
45 x 30 cm
Edition of 7



Ubuntu, 2026
Archival inkjet print on Felix Schoeller, adhered to
diabond
45 x 30 cm
Edition of 7

SELECTED RÉSUMÉ

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS

- 2026 *After the Tide*, Berman Contemporary, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2026 *Fatal Flowers*, Candice Berman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2023 *Cast Away*, Bildhalle, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
- 2023 *Plastic Ocean*, public installation, Capture Photography Festival, Vancouver, Canada
- 2021 *Plastic Ocean*, Bildhalle, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
- 2021 *Plastic Ocean*, public installation, Contact Photography Festival, Toronto, Canada
- 2021 *Plastic Ocean*, public installation, StandardVision, Los Angeles, USA
- 2019 *DSM Heerlen*, DSM Headquarters, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
- 2019 *Plastic Ocean*, Christie's, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
- 2009 *Play Dead*, Gallery Christian Ouwens, Rotterdam, the Netherlands

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2025 *Flowers-Flora in Contemporary Art & Culture*, Saatchi Gallery, London, United Kingdom
- 2025 *Blooming*, Bildhalle, Zurich, Switzerland
- 2023 *Rethink the Present, Remake the Past*, Modern Art Museum, Shanghai, China
- 2022 *Transformation/Liberation*, public installation, Wembley Park, London, United Kingdom
- 2022 *Royal Academy Summer Exhibition*, special guest, Royal Academy of Arts, London, United Kingdom
- 2022 *Flora Imaginaria: The Flower in Contemporary Photography*, Saatchi Gallery, London, United Kingdom
- 2022 *Ocean- Summer Exhibition*, Bildhalle, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
- 2022 *The Garden of Delight*, Budapest, Hungary
- 2017 *Finders Keepers*, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, the Netherlands

SELECTED ART FAIRS

- 2026 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, Candice Berman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2025 Investec, Samuel Meanhout gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2023 photo basel, Bildhalle, Basel, Switzerland
- 2021 Art Rotterdam, Bildhalle, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- 2021 Unseen, Bildhalle, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
- 2020 Art Rotterdam, We Like Art, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- 2020 Turbine Art Fair, Candice Berman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2019 Art Rotterdam, We Like Art, Rotterdam, the Netherlands

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

- MN Group, the Netherlands
- dsm-firmenich, the Netherlands
- Radboud University Medical Centre, the Netherlands
- KPMG, the Netherlands
- United Nations Environment Programme, Switzerland
- DHB Bank, the Netherlands
- Swiss Re, Switzerland
- Fidelity Investments, United States
- Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Collection, the Netherlands
- Vanderlande collection, the Netherlands
- a.s.r. Insurance, the Netherlands

MONOGRAPHS AND SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- 2022 Ewing, W.A. and Panchaud, D. (2022) *Flora Photographica: Masterworks of Contemporary Flower Photography*. London: Thames & Hudson
- 2021 Schaap, T. (2021) *Plastic Ocean*. Amsterdam: 1605 Publishers
- 2009 Stigter, B. (2009) *Play Dead*. Rotterdam: Christian Ouwens, Uitgeverij

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- 2021 Inspiration Award, Humanistic Association of the Netherlands, presented by Hedy d'Ancona for the Plastic Ocean project, the Netherlands
2000 PANL Photography Award, the Netherlands

SELECTED PRESS

- 2026 *The beautiful mess we leave behind*, Timeslive
2026 *Thirza's Beautiful Trash Lures You In*, Mail & Guardian
2026 *Treasures Swept in by The Tide*, VISI Magazine
2025 *The Invisible Threat of Microplastics*, Goop
2025 *Beneath the Waves*, Aesthetica Magazine
2025 *How We Became Corrupted by Plastic*, The New York Times
2024 *Thirza Schaap: Melancholy notes on resisting deletion of plastic and memories*, C14 Magazine
2023 *Using beauty and ugliness together – Thirza Schaap's plastic waste sculptures*, Lampoon Magazine
2022 *Beachcombed sculptures of ocean plastic – in pictures*, The Guardian
2021 *Artist Feature: Thirza Schaap*, Feminist
2021 *Wie aus gestrandetem Plastik Kunst wird*, Süddeutsche Zeitung
2021 *Findings*, Harper's Magazine
2021 *Mooi van lelijkheid: deze fotograaf verheft plastic afval tot kunst*, de Volksrant
2020 *Thirza Schaap proposes a provoking double reading in her artwork*, Vogue Singapore
2020 *Woman Crush Wednesday: Thirza Schaap*, Musée Magazine
2019 *The Photographer Giving New Life to Ocean Plastic*, Aperture
2019 *Conversations on Plastic with Thirza Schaap*, Urth Magazine
2019 *Plastic litter art sends a message*, News24
2017 *Thirza Schaap 'Plastic Ocean' series turns trash into sculptural still-lives in a bid to stop pollution*, designboom
2017 *Thirza Schaap Captures Beach Debris In 'Plastic Ocean'*, Ignant

SELECTED TALKS AND PUBLIC PROGRAMMES

- 2021 World Hope Forum, Dutch Design Week webinar with Lidewij Edelkoort, Eindhoven, the Netherlands
2018 SUBVERSION, artist lecture curated by Michel Mallard, Fabrica Research Centre, Venice, Italy

Berman Contemporary All Women Art V&A Waterfront

Berman Contemporary is a concept-driven, practice-led gallery founded by Candice Berman in 2016. Based in Cape Town, the gallery works with artists whose practices unfold through sustained inquiry, experimentation, and material investigation. We platform women artists because many of the most rigorous and conceptually engaged practices today are being developed by women.

We do not simply present objects. We present how artists think.

We understand exhibitions as propositions: spaces in which artistic practices are brought into conversation and ideas can be encountered through form, material, and process. Against accelerated and image-driven modes of consumption, we create conditions in which art can be encountered slowly, thoughtfully, and with curiosity.

Through exhibitions, publications, events, and collaborative projects, the gallery cultivates sustained engagement with contemporary art and fosters exchanges between artists, ideas, and audiences.

Our programme brings together emerging and established artists whose practices are driven by questions rather than predetermined outcomes. We work with artists who test the capacities of their materials, challenge ways of seeing, and open new possibilities for experience. The gallery's commitment is to artistic rigour, intellectual generosity, and the long-term support of artistic practice.

Website bermancontemporary.com

Instagram @bermancontemporary

bermancontemporary.com
gallery@bermancontemporary.co.za
+27 (0)84 843 8302

