







We are climbing up the stairs, happy that we already made it to the third floor. We are dazzled by the Escher-like stairs that seem to never end. Suddenly, an alarm goes off. Our minds go spinning as we try to think where we entered the building. Hopefully, we took a picture that depicts it all...*

And yes, they got that picture (p. 28, picture at the top). In fact, it got chosen out of an innumerable amount of pictures to get published in 'Hier woont alleen de tijd' (translated as 'Only time lives here'), a book created by Billie and Maarten Slagboom. Together, daughter and father travelled all around the world to discover the hidden beauty behind buildings out of order. Now they share it in their book, and in this edition of pantheon//, to let people think about the temporality of our existence.

"It all started in 2016, when I was just fifteen years old and bored at secondary school", Billie tells. She already had been photographing for a while and made a list of places where she would like to travel to. "In my list, the Taj Mahal stood next to abandoned buildings. I did not really make a distinction between them, because they all looked beautiful to me." Her father Maarten, who has loads of experience in photography, perceived that Billie wanted to go on an adventure. He read an article about the industrial city Charleroi, which had been acclaimed as 'the most unattractive city in the world'. "My immediate thought was: why unattractive? We jumped in the car and decided to search for the hidden beauty."

That led to an unstoppable fascination for buildings that were abandoned and partly taken over by nature. They started with photographing factories, but soon the fascination expanded to more intimate spaces like classrooms and residences. Maarten says the following about this intimacy: "You often see pictures of abandoned castles or cathedrals. However, we think those are less personal. You cannot picture yourself living in such a building, while you can when you are looking at a kitchen. We want to appeal to one's imagination."

That is also the reason that there is no text to be found in their book. "We do not tell you what you are looking at exactly. We want you to interpret it your own way, so your life can be reflected in it", Billie explains. Neither are the photos separated by chapters. Maarten elaborates: "We hope it works as one 'Zone'. It does not matter which function a building has, or where it is located, because they are similar in a certain way. As time passes, all buildings grow towards each other. They smell the same and you hear the same sounds".

We left the building. There are countless things racing through our minds. We feel calm and happy. We feel void, in the best way possible. We are conscious about time and our temporality. We get into the car and for a moment, there is perfect silence. Then, we turn up the music and feel cheerful. A celebration of life.

Even though the pictures are not only about the buildings, architecture does play an important role in their book. They did some research and discovered architects who have the same fascination for ruins. Maarten brings up architect John Soane, who designed the Bank of England during the 19th century. "While designing, he fantasized about how it would look like when it would become a ruin", Maarten explains. Soane even let someone paint how the bank would look like as a ruin. "And he is not the only one," Billie continues, "nazi-architect Albert Speer thought about designing buildings that would look beautiful as ruins as well, which he called 'ruin value'".

So, thinking about the long-term future, do Billie and Maarten have any future plans? "At the moment, we are searching for new places to photograph. We are also still imagining how certain buildings would look if they were out of order. But it is hard to tell which ones we can photograph, because many of them are being torn down or renovated," Billie tells, "even some of the buildings that are pictured in the book, are gone now".

While singing along with the music, we think about what we have seen. The building we visited felt like a person to us. She talked to us and she told us stories about everything she had been through. We listened, breathlessly. We wrote it down and took it home. Now it is your turn to read her story.

*The text in bold is fictional, written by the writer but in the spirit of Billie's and Maarten's story. //