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13 JUN 2015 - 01 NOV 2015

Song Dong exhibition | Groningen



 songdong1_1 Chinese artist Song Dong exhibition 'Life is Art, Art is Life' takes place at the Groninger Museum in Groningen and runs till 1st November 2015. It includes the extraordinary large installation *Waste Not*, presented for the first time in the Netherlands. Family relationships and material culture are important themes for the world-renowned Chinese artist Song Dong. On show in the Coop Himmelb(l)au pavilion of the Groninger Museum, *Waste Not* is presented in the Netherlands for the first time. The work is a collaboration with the artist's mother. *Waste*

Not centres on Song Dong's mother, Zhao Xiangyuan. Zhao grew up in a prosperous family that met with hardship after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Her father was an officer of the Kuomintang (KMT), the Chinese Nationalist Party that ruled much of China from 1928 until its defeat in 1949, when Mao Zedong forced the KMT to retreat to Taiwan. In 1950 Zhao moved with her parents to Beijing, where her father was arrested in 1953 on charges of espionage for the KMT. Her mother died in 1961. Events of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, like the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, cost millions of Chinese people their lives and reduced Zhao's family to poverty. Typical of the generation of Chinese who lived under these circumstances, Zhao Xiangyuan felt compelled to abide by the communist dictum *wù jìn qí yòng*, or Waste Not and live thriftily and economically. Entering upon better days, however, Zhao continued to stick to this principle. Her thriftiness turned into an almost pathological passion for collecting. To arm herself against the possible recurrence of poverty and scarcity, Zhao refused to throw away anything that might be reused. Her hoarding became obsessive after the death of her husband in 2002, whereupon Song Dong and his sister felt compelled to intervene. Attempts to help her clear up came to nothing. Eventually, they managed to convince their mother to part with her collection by holding on to her own conviction: 'Waste Not.' Song converted her entire collection, the result of 50 years of diligent saving, into a work of art. **The installation *Waste Not* consists of more than 10,000 items, carefully arranged by functions.** The sub-collections include ballpoint pens, plastic carrier bags, bottle tops, dishes, soft toys, food containers, cutlery, empty toothpaste tubes and shoeboxes arranged in neat rows and stacks around the timber frame of a house. This building originally stood next to Song Dong's parental home in Beijing, but was cleared away during the preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. **Song Dong** (Beijing, 1966) is one of the most important internationally operating Chinese artists. At Documenta 2012, he was represented by the sculpture entitled *Doing Nothing Garden*, which consisted of a hill built up out of rubbish, covered with wild flowers, with a bench around it upon which people could simply sit and stare. Dong was educated in traditional fashion, but in 1989 he abruptly quit painting, to manifest himself again with performance, photography and video a few years later. He later expanded his work with installations such as *Eating the World* (made for the Groninger Museum) a map of the world built of sweets, which the public actually is allowed to eat. Read more - in conversation with the artist by [Alex Lebbink for #SinArts](#)

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