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*Strandbeest* Drifting Alive  
The Otherworldly Sculptures of Theo Jansen

Contemporary Danish artist Theo Jansen first began constructing his massive kinesthetic sculptures, *Strandbeest*, in 1991 (Figure 1). “I wanted to construct new forms of life,” is how Jansen himself describes the initial origins of his project.<sup>1</sup> Along with this ambitious goal of innovating new life-forms, the artist also intended to restrict his use of materials. To create his first *Strandbeest*, Jansen would build only using electric cable tubes—a rudimentary tool for home building in Holland. This was more than intellectual or artistic goading. Jansen wanted to uninhibitedly explore the most naked mind creation. To begin the tableaux was blank.

Since the *Strandbeest* first iterations, these brilliantly engineered art objects have continuously evolved: shifting materiality, alterations in scale, innovative final appearances (Figure 2). In both form and content, the poetic sculptures explore a new frontier of both making and living—an ulterior domain where man and beast, stasis and mobility are complicatedly interwoven. The tender existence of Jansen’s levitating beasts reveals in their sincere humility and celestial spirithood a sublime ethos of otherworldliness. Most compelling, however, are the myriad ways Jansen’s creatures operate within a variegated landscape of interstices. This paper will explore these liminal spaces inscribed in the wanderlust ethos of his art forms. Specifically, I am most interested in three particular threshold that are part and parcel with Jansen’s dynamic sculptures. It is underscored by a question of what constitutes life.

Drifting along the beach, each of Jansen’s *Strandbeest* autonomously glides with only the help of the wind: the creatures breathe in the natural landscape. His work evokes question of the Anthropocene, an ethics pulsating beyond the human, and the blurry edges of life outside the social. Next, I look at the geographic places central to Jansen’s art. The environment is an essential aspect to the entire oeuvre of his work. *Strandbeest* move on the beach, playing in sand and the salty coasts of powdery rock. They walk in that fluid boundary space separating earth and sea (Figure 3). Last, I uncover an unspoken dialogic element to the work. This final aspect is twofold. First, the materiality of Jansen’s work is paramount. His sculptures are built from reused and recyclable materials; in many ways, *Strandbeest* are literally an apotheosis of waste. In a sense, his life-forms question the ontology of being even at the basest level of their production. In turn, they are creatures that can proliferate *ad infinitum*, living forever outside the imposed human constraints of need and use, excess and lack. It is also because of this ability to birth out of detritus that Jansen’s ideal hope is for anyone, anywhere, and everyone, everywhere, to eventually construct their own *Strandbeest*.<sup>2</sup> Self-generating kits are available for purchase.

Thanks for considering my work.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b\\_hxDB7scEg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_hxDB7scEg). Presentation. *Strandbeest: The Dream Machines of Theo Jansen*.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.strandbeest.com/shop/index.php>

Figure 1



Figure 2

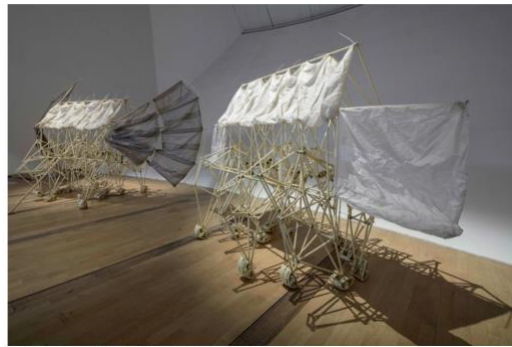


Figure 3

