

WERELDLAB NIJMEGEN LAUNCHES PHOTO BIENNALE *LENS*

On 22 January 2026, Wereldlab Nijmegen – part of Wereldmuseum – opens the first edition of the biennale *LENS, International Photo Expo Nijmegen*, at the iconic De Nieuwe Honig. This biennial exhibition radically frees photography from the wall: from still image to movement, from collage to installation, *LENS* shows that every photograph is part of a larger shared world. In this first edition, themed CROWDS, four international artists and one collective explore the many forms a group of people can take. The conclusion is clear: we are always part of a greater whole, as the artists each demonstrate in their own highly distinctive way.

CROWDS: WHERE INDIVIDUALS DISSOLVE INTO A LARGER WHOLE

The four artists and the collective selected for this first edition of *LENS* challenge visitors to see photography as something more than what the eye captures. The exhibition invites reflection on the images that surround us in everyday life and questions where we assign power. It proposes an alternative starting point: one in which the strength of photography does not lie in isolating, recording, or immortalising, but in moving, disrupting, and combining.

In this first edition of the biennale, the CROWDS theme takes centre stage. The crowd is viewed as an organism in which the individual dissolves and yet remains visible, as part of a community or a timeline. Collectivity emerges as something that is not singular, but layered, constantly in motion and deeply human. Visitors are invited to step inside and to reflect on their own role within groups and communities. They are invited to consider the meaning of togetherness, as individuals and as a world: coming together, moving along, dissolving, colliding, and being carried. With their noses right up against it and right in the middle of it, visitors become part of energetic, monumental spaces as well as quiet, reflective moments.

With *LENS*, Wereldlab Nijmegen taps into a new way of experiencing photographic art. As they leave the exhibition, visitors may take with them new questions: What brings me together with others? How can my own energy become part of a larger whole? And what responsibility do I carry in the dynamics of collectivity, locally and globally?

ARTISTS *LENS* 2026

The artists featured in *LENS* were selected by both photography specialists and interdisciplinary experts, ensuring that artistic practice was central to the selection process. Each of the artists chosen for this edition approaches the CROWDS theme from their own background, field of work, and visual language, resulting in an exhibition that offers a rich, layered perspective on what collectivity can mean worldwide.

South African artist Graeme Arendse focuses on community rituals and physical expression. He captures the energy of dancing crowds by placing the goema drum and its rhythm at the heart of his work. The space pulses with drums, breath, and movement, allowing visitors to experience the physical cadence of connectedness on a bodily level.

The Australian collective Miyarrka Media, known for its research into how digital spaces shape and organise emotion, transforms the exhibition space into a network of digital intimacy. The work shows how selfies, video messages, and digital gestures form and continuously shift an online crowd. Relationships with ancestors come alive in the installation, opening up our understanding of the possibilities of the digital realm.

Rooted in experiences of diaspora and spiritual ecology, Michelle Piergoelam's work brings visitors into contact with invisible crowds. Driven by her desire to connect with her Surinamese ancestors, she creates poetic installations and photographic interventions in which the presence of those who came before us becomes tangible: ancestors, stories, and movements that extend beyond the visible world. Her work shows that collectivity is not formed solely in the here and now but transcends generations.

The Palestinian–Jordanian artist Samaa Alu Allaban, whose work holds on to collective identity in a time of genocide, focuses on the tangible rituals of everyday togetherness. Here, the crowd becomes intimate: through her collages of people at tables, in kitchens, and around shared meals, she makes visible how communities share, pass on, shape, and – in the face of destruction – preserve memories from one generation to the next.

A form of collectivity is also central to the work of Peruvian–American artist Tarrak Krajnak, who combines performance, feminist history, and political archival material. In her case, this collectivity manifests itself in the public realm. Krajnak presents protest as a powerful choreography of bodies: raised fists, synchronised breathing, voices becoming one. Working with photographs from historic publications, she inserts herself into these images to show how photography shapes our understanding of identity. Projected photographs of protests in Lima in 1979 connect her personal dislocation through adoption with broader narratives of oppression, resistance, and resilience, echoed in the accompanying sound work.

A LIVING EXHIBITION WITH A GROWING CROWD

The exhibition is a dynamic meeting place where art, research, and social energy come together, and where visitors are just as important as the makers. Everyone is invited to take part. Visitors photograph one another's raised fists with an instant camera, colour in the black–and–white prints, paint over them, and add words and symbols. In this way, the presentation grows over the course of the exhibition into an ever–changing mass of images that visualises the collective energy of its visitors. Fully in line with the participatory mission of Wereldlab Nijmegen, *LENS* playfully blurs the boundary between maker and spectator.

CONNECTING WITH THE COLLECTION

The biennial exhibition *LENS* connects the extensive photography collection of Wereldmuseum with the public. From the 700,000 photographs in the collection, a selection was made in collaboration with the artists, engaging in dialogue with their own work. As a result, visitors experience a unique context in which contemporary photographic art and historical imagery reinforce one another.

DE NIEUWE HONIG: AN ICONIC LOCATION

This first edition of the *LENS* biennale takes place at an iconic location: De Nieuwe Honig, where, like Wereldlab, the future is approached with optimism. Through this exhibition, Wereldlab becomes a temporary part of a new cultural hub. Coinciding with the opening of *LENS*, galleries will open on the site. An art café, a hospitality venue, and a music stage are to follow soon.

WERELDLAB

Wereldlab is the experimental platform of Wereldmuseum, a national museum organisation with locations in Amsterdam, Leiden, and Rotterdam. Its spatial ambition is a Wereldmuseum in the centre of Nijmegen: a museum dedicated to world histories, global art, and material and immaterial culture. What this museum will ultimately look like remains entirely open. In the coming years, Wereldlab will explore and help shape the Wereldmuseum of the future. Which stories will be told, which themes addressed, and which objects, artworks, and material cultures will be exhibited? What does the public want? Through interactive programmes, rooted in art and developed together with science, visitors are invited to become active participants in the shared exploration of the future of Wereldmuseum in Nijmegen.

LENS, International Photo Expo Nijmegen

Theme 2026: *CROWDS*

From 23/01/2026 to 28/06/2026, Thursday to Sunday 12h00 – 17h00

De Nieuwe Honig Nijmegen