

Rik Dijkhuizen

Pondering

On view: 13 May – 1 June 2026

Curated by Wisse Kodde

With the presentation *Pondering*, artist Rik Dijkhuizen brings together a selection of works developed over the past five years, continuing a decade-long engagement with mental health and wellbeing in contemporary society. Working across photography, installation, and embodied research, Dijkhuizen reflects on the hidden narratives surrounding mental health through both lived experience and the broader social, cultural, and institutional frameworks that shape how it is perceived and negotiated today – and how it might be reimagined in the future.

Mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and panic attacks are widespread, yet are often endured privately and surrounded by stigma within an increasingly hyper-individualistic society, where expectations of productivity, performative perfectionism, and normative conformity persist. Frequently framed as personal failure, inconvenience, inability, or lack of resilience, mental illness can profoundly affect a person's ability to participate in social and economic life. At the same time, it is often treated as an individual problem to be managed, rather than as something shaped by broader social and structural conditions that require collective forms of support and care.

Dijkhuizen investigates the conditions surrounding mental health across different contexts, while also developing speculative spaces as testing ground for alternative social logics and forms of care. By inhabiting and embodying these contexts – often through photography and installation – he works through and alongside these conditions, remaining close to how they are felt, shaped, and socially, culturally, and institutionally produced. With his ongoing practice, Dijkhuizen aims to foster dialogue and reflection on mental health, raise awareness, open up conversation, and challenge the stigmas that prevent society from acknowledging its role in shaping more open and inclusive forms of care and community.

The presentation at Sauvage Space is curated by Wisse Kodde and includes the works *Pondering* (2026), *Turin Horse* (2020–2022), *Walls Don't Clear Water* (2021), and *Good Fortune (in situ)* (2023). It takes pondering as both title and invitation – referring both to inward reflection and thought, and to the need for sustained reflection on the complexities of mental health and its conditions – opening up a space for dialogue and collective negotiation beyond the works themselves.

Pondering

2026. Mixed media installation with photo work and medical screen.

At the centre of the presentation is a new work titled *Pondering* (2026), consisting of a photographic self-portrait installed behind a semi-transparent medical privacy screen. The photograph depicts the artist in deep thought within a space suspended between psychological and physical reality. Positioned directly in front of the image, the screen partially obscures the view, compelling visitors to look through, around, or past it in order to fully encounter the work.

Traditionally, medical privacy screens establish a boundary between public and private space, protecting bodily dignity and granting patients a degree of agency by shielding them from exposure. In *Pondering*, this function is subtly inverted. The screen no longer simply conceals or protects; instead, its semi-transparency produces an uneasy in-between condition where visibility is always partial – precisely the space where mental health often becomes legible. What is usually kept private is neither fully hidden nor fully accessible. It remains present but not fully readable, visible yet difficult to articulate, continually negotiated between recognition and misunderstanding. *Pondering* reflects on this tension between exposure and withdrawal, intimacy and protection. The screen becomes both barrier and threshold, suggesting how structures associated with care can simultaneously protect, expose, and complicate what is seen.

Turin Horse

2020–2022. Photo series, supported by Foam Magazine.

In *Turin Horse* (2020–2022), the artist explored the stigma surrounding mental wellbeing through a long-term performative and photographic process. Over the course of three years, Dijkhuizen visited a local passport photographer each time he experienced a panic attack or moment of acute psychological distress. The resulting portraits – over 300 in total, of which 20 are presented here – document states of anxiety, loneliness, exhaustion, and fear: emotions typically concealed behind the socially conditioned obligation to appear composed, productive, and in control.

By repeatedly entering the highly standardised setting of the passport studio during moments of emotional instability, Dijkhuizen examines and disrupts expectations embedded within both portraiture and everyday social behaviour. Referencing Friedrich Nietzsche's final breakdown in Turin in 1889 – often linked to his witnessing of a horse being violently whipped – the work reflects on how psychological collapse is culturally framed as individual failure. Nietzsche's "madness" has become a symbolic narrative through which mental health is moralised and isolated, cast as a personal challenge rather than understood in relation to shared or structural conditions. *Turin Horse* connects this to contemporary forms of individualisation, where anxiety, exhaustion, and mental distress are internalised as personal responsibility rather than approached through shared or collective structures of care.

Walls Don't Clear Water

2021. Mixed media installation, supported by Vrouw Muskens, GGZ Breburg, Mondriaan Fonds, Provincie Brabant, Stichting Stokroos.

A related concern with institutional structures appears in *Walls Don't Clear Water* (2021), presented here through five photographs focusing on the isolation cell and the carefully choreographed architecture surrounding it – spaces directly linked to how patients were observed, regulated, and separated within psychiatric institutions. The works were developed during a residency at a psychiatric care facility in the South of the Netherlands, where Dijkhuizen researched its history and voluntarily spent extended periods locked inside the former cell, as part of an embodied inquiry into the spatial and psychological conditions of confinement.

Psychiatric institutions emerged as tightly controlled spaces designed to contain people deemed unable to participate in society, framing them as "deficient" patients to be managed, corrected, or removed from public life. Care became inseparable from correction: behaviour was monitored and adjusted, and autonomy could be suspended through enforced isolation. What was framed as safety often operated as control, where vulnerability was managed through separation rather than support. Architecture here dictates a "choreography of care" – structuring movement, visibility, and interaction. The photographs foreground this logic through locked doors, bare surfaces, controlled sightlines, and environments designed to discipline the body through observation and restriction. The isolation cell embodies this system in its most extreme form – tightly controlled and used for enforced isolation under constant surveillance.

With this body of work, Dijkhuizen reflects on the lasting architectural and psychological traces of such forms of institutional violence and dehumanisation. Although these systems have formally changed, the works suggest that the underlying mechanisms of categorisation – distinguishing able bodies from patients – continue to persist in more subtle forms within contemporary society. The title *Walls Don't Clear Water* refers to this condition: walls may divide, contain, and regulate, but they do not resolve, cleanse, or neutralise what they enclose. Instead, they retain traces of experience, control, and memory that continue to resonate beyond the structures themselves.

Good Fortune (in situ)

2023. Yellow vinyl sticker, 72cm diameter

Questions surrounding wellbeing, diagnosis, and uncertainty also emerge in *Good Fortune (in situ)* (2023), a minimal wall-based work consisting of a yellow vinyl circle installed directly onto the wall. The piece references Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Stein des guten Glücks* (1777), a sculpture installed in the garden of his Weimar home, composed of a sphere balanced on a cube. For Goethe, this pairing functioned as a metaphor for life as a shifting interplay between stability and flux: the cube standing for moral grounding and virtue, the sphere for movement, unpredictability, and change. In their precarious balance, he understood "good fortune" not as chance alone, but as a dynamic relation between control and contingency – a way of living that remains attentive, receptive, and never fully in control.

Dijkhuizen echoes this composition but removes its stabilising base entirely. The sphere becomes a flat, floating circle fixed to the wall, reduced to a suspended sign of movement without support – a condition often at the root of mental distress. The vivid yellow dot recalls warning labels on medication packaging, linking it to the visual language of pharmaceutical care. The work reflects on life without stability, where wellbeing is continually suspended rather than secured. Medication does not necessarily cure illness, but often maintains it in a managed state – extending dependency and turning illness into something that can be sustained, administered, and capitalised upon. It asks what it means when relief is partial, and when care itself becomes entangled with systems that profit from its ongoing necessity.



Rik Dijkhuizen, *Turin Horse* #22, 2020



J.W. von Goethe, *Stein des guten Glücks*, 1777, Weimar (Germany).

Rik Dijkhuizen (NL, 1988) is a visual artist whose multidisciplinary practice reflects on mental health within a hyper-individualistic society. Through scenographic installations and speculative narratives, he draws on personal references and associations to construct environments for wellbeing and collective embodiment – constructed spaces that invite reflection and critical engagement. These works are not quite of this world, yet remain strangely familiar, situated between reality and fiction. Water is a recurring material and conceptual thread throughout his practice. Dijkhuizen studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, and Art History and Aesthetics at the University of Amsterdam.

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