

Sea



Votive altar of the goddess Nehalennia offered by Ingenuinus Ianuaris at the Roman temple near Domburg, AD 150–250 (limestone). Collection Zeeland Society. Photo Ivo Wennekes.

This is Zeeland

Salt

Before the invention of the fridge, salt is a very important means of preserving perishable foodstuffs such as meat and fish. The proximity of the sea makes it easy to harvest salt in Zeeland. The earliest traces of salt harvesting in Zeeland come from an archaeological find from the middle Iron Age (500-200 BC). In the Roman period and the Middle Ages, salt is one of the region's most important export products.

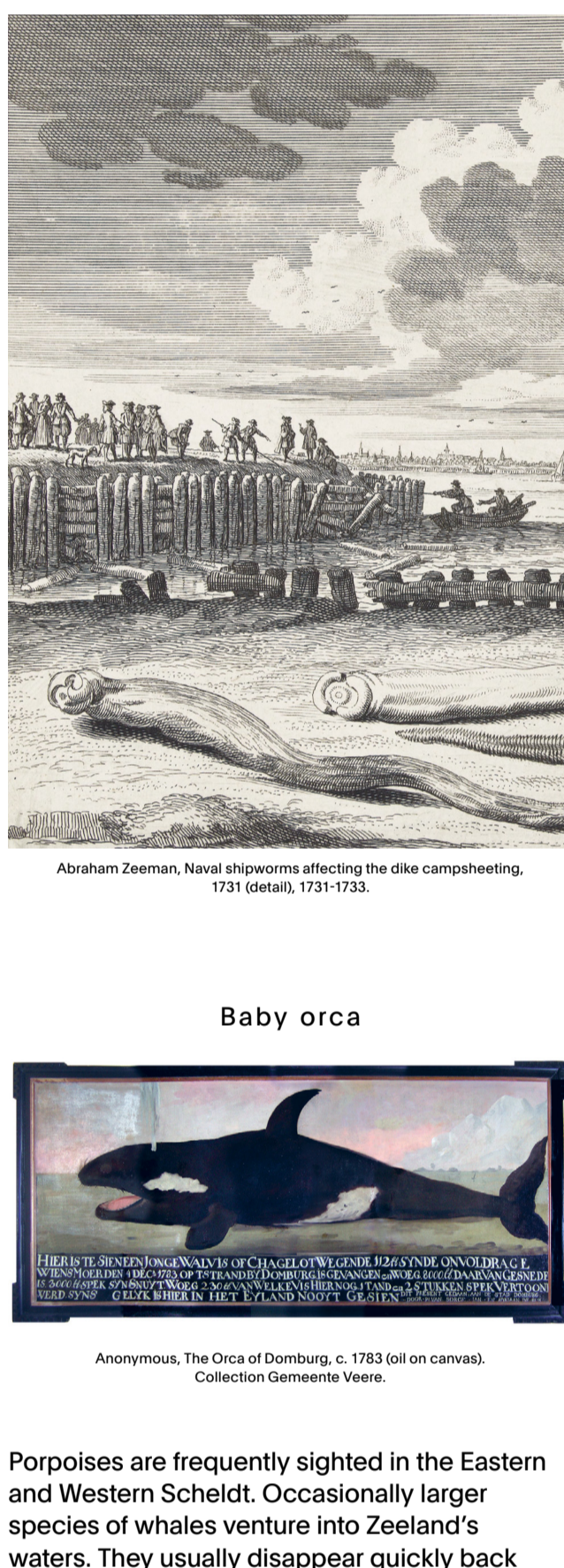


Anonymous, Salt harvesting in Zeeland in the 16th century, 18th/19th century (oil on canvas). Collection Zeeland Society. Photo Ivo Wennekes.

Initially salt is harvested directly from seawater through evaporation in porous pots. From the Middle Ages it is extracted from peat, which has a much higher concentration of salt. Blocks of peat are dried and then burned, leaving behind a mixture of ash and salt. To separate the two, they are mixed with seawater. The salt is dissolved and the ash sinks to the bottom. The seawater is then evaporated, leaving behind a layer of fine salt crystals.

Extracting salt from peat is not without danger for the countryside. By removing layers of clay to get to the peat layers, the land behind the dykes is lowered. If the dyke breaks, the land will be flooded. To prevent such disasters, this means of salt extraction is eventually forbidden. Salt production continues in Zeeland until the 19th century: raw salt is imported and refined locally.

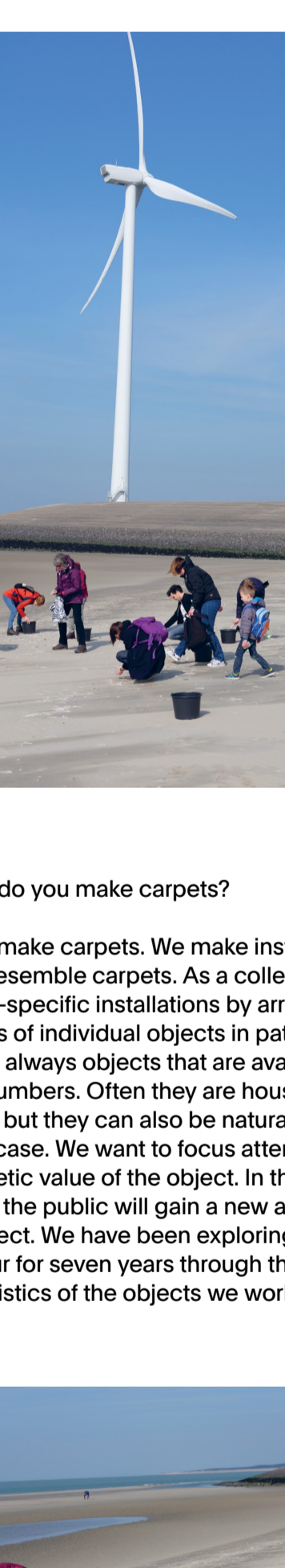
This is one of the reasons for Justin Modera to donate a salt chair to the Royal Zeeland Society of Arts and Sciences in 1846. He wants to show that salt from Curaçao is of a high quality and can be purified in Zeeland.



Salt chair, Curaçao, 1825-1845 (salt, wood). Collection Zeeland Society. Photo Ivo Wennekes.

Nehalennia

On 5 January 1647, following a heavy storm, the remains of a Roman temple are found on the beach at Domburg. Among the fragments are more than twenty altar stones. According to the Latin inscriptions, the majority are devoted to an unknown goddess: Nehalennia. The votive stones and other remains are moved to the Dutch Reformed Church in Domburg. To spread the word about this extraordinary find, drawings and descriptions are made of the altar stones. Fortunately, because in 1848 the church goes up in flames and the majority of the stones are destroyed or damaged. This altar stone is one of the few that survives the fire.



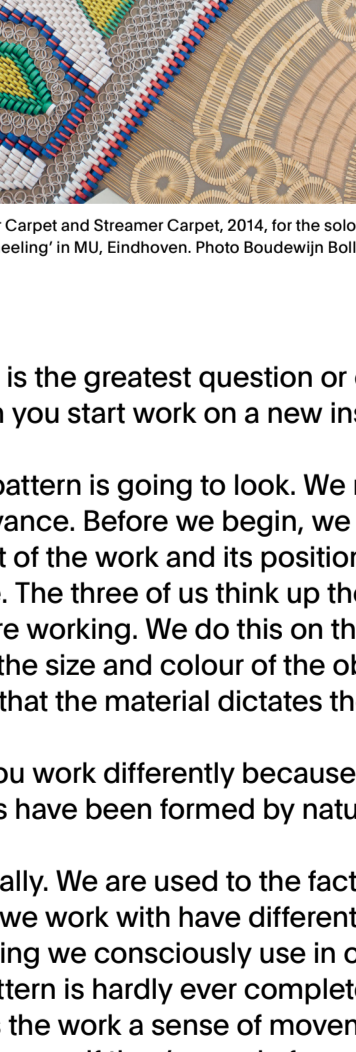
J. Goeree, The discovery of three altar stones of the goddess Nehalennia on the beach near Domburg in 1647 and three medals minted by order of the States of Zeeland from 1662-1693. Zeeuws Archief, Zeeland Society, Zelandia illustrata, part III, nr 446-1.

In the Roman period the west coast of Walcheren extends further into the North Sea. As the dunes shift and the ocean currents change, the coastline gradually recedes. The temple remains discovered in 1647 are part of a Roman settlement that conducts trade with the hinterland and with coastal towns in England and France. It exports salt and fish sauce and acts as a market for the trade in pottery, wine and olive oil.

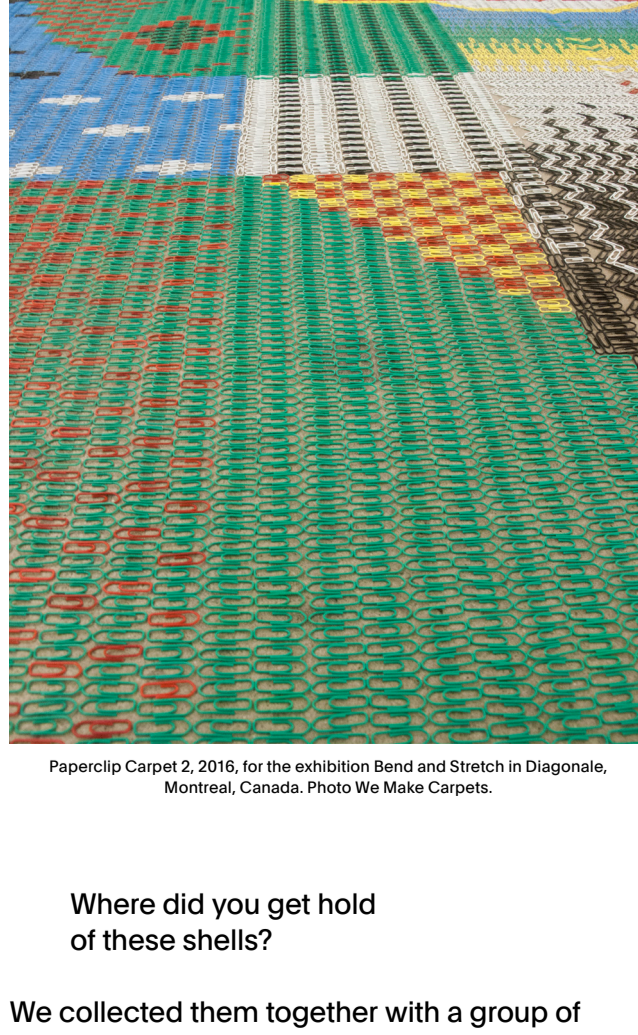
The goddess Nehalennia protects merchants and seamen. Before setting out to sea, they pray to Nehalennia for a safe voyage, promising the goddess a gift, often in the form of a votive stone, if they return safely. This is then placed near the temple. There is also a Roman harbour town near Colijnsplaat where the goddess Nehalennia is worshipped.

Naval shipworm

After 1730 the naval shipworm, *Teredo navalis*, poses a threat to ships, dykes and quaysides. The elongated mollusc eats its way through anything made of wood, thus destabilising beams and planks. The creatures are a true menace: they necessitate reinforcing the dykes with stones and greater expenditure on coastal defences. At the time, several preachers are convinced that the naval shipworm has been sent by god to punish homosexuality.



Naval shipworm in alcohol [*Teredo navalis*]. Collection Zeeland Society. Photo Ivo Wennekes.



Abraham Zeeman, Naval shipworms affecting the dike campsheets, 1731 (detail), 1731-1733.

Baby orca



Anonymous, The Orca of Domburg, c. 1783 (oil on canvas). Collection Gemeente Veere.

Porpoises are frequently sighted in the Eastern and Western Scheldt. Occasionally larger species of whales venture into Zeeland's waters. They usually disappear quickly back into the deeper North Sea, but sometimes they get stuck. On 4 December 1783 a female killer whale is stranded on the beach between Domburg and Oostkapelle. The 8-metre-long animal does not survive. The whale is butchered and yields 3000 pounds of blubber. An unborn calf is found in her belly.

The foetus, weighing 112 pounds is exhibited in the Oranjeboom (Orange Tree) tavern in Middelburg. A painting is also made of the baby orca. It is positioned on the beach where its mother has washed up. Pieter van Sorge, Jan and Adriaan de Buck donate the painting to the city of Domburg. The baby whale is stuffed but opinions differ on the success of the taxidermy. According to A.B. van Deinsen, an expert who describes the animal in 1930, it is entirely unsuccessful: it looks more like a shark than the killer whale in the painting.

Interview

We Make Carpets

Why do you make carpets?

We don't make carpets. We make installations that resemble carpets. As a collective, we make site-specific installations by arranging thousands of individual objects in patterns. These are always objects that are available in huge numbers. Often they are household products, but they can also be natural objects, as in this case. We want to focus attention on the aesthetic value of the object. In this way, we hope that the public will gain a new appreciation of the object. We have been exploring pattern and colour for seven years through the specific characteristics of the objects we work with.

Hook Carpet, 2016, assignment for 21_21 Design Sight in Tokyo, Japan. Photo We Make Carpets.

Why have you now chosen (these) shells?

We have opted to make three works from three sorts of shells that are widely available in Zeeland (and the Netherlands). The mussel is a typical consumer product from Zeeland. Ask someone what they associate Zeeland with and they will probably say 'mussels'. The razor clam is a remarkable shell that everyone who has been to a beach has seen. For us, the heart shaped shell is the archetypal shell. Ask someone to draw a shell and they will draw this form.

Skewer Carpet and Streamer Carpet, 2014, for the solo exhibition 'Kneeling' in MU, Eindhoven. Photo Boudewijn Bollmann.

What is the greatest question or challenge when you start work on a new installation?

How the pattern is going to look. We never know this in advance. Before we begin, we know the format of the work and its position within the space. The three of us think up the pattern while we're working. We do this on the basis of the form, the size and colour of the objects. We often say that the material dictates the pattern.

Do you work differently because the shells have been formed by nature?

No, not really. We are used to the fact that the materials we work with have different sizes. That is something we consciously use in our work. So the pattern is hardly ever completely straight. This gives the work a sense of movement and an extra texture, as if they're made from textile.

Paperclip Carpet 2, 2016, for the exhibition Bend and Stretch in Diagonale, Montreal, Canada. Photo We Make Carpets.

Where did you get hold of these shells?

We collected them together with a group of volunteers on beaches and from restaurants. The razor clam shells come from the beach at Neeltje Jans and we ate the mussels with the same volunteers in the restaurant around the corner. The heart shaped shells come from the beach at Domburg.

