

The Brooklyn Rail – Critics Page

[Dreaming between Suriname, the Netherlands and the United States](#)

By Miko Veldkamp

March 2025

 **BROOKLYN RAIL**

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE · INDEPENDENT AND FREE

CRITICS PAGE | MARCH 2025

## Dreaming between Suriname, the Netherlands and the United States



Miko Veldkamp, *Bouquet*, 2024. Oil, acrylic, and ink on canvas, 40 x 40 inches. Courtesy Alice Amati. Photo: Tom Carter

I know that if you walked into the jungle from here and kept walking in a straight line for months, you'd exit on the other side of the continent. It's the Amazon rainforest and we are at the north end of it. My

# ALICE AMATI

grandmother's house is made of wooden planks, corrugated sheets for a roof, and glass jalousie windows. She wears a traditional sarong. She and my mother speak Javanese, I speak Dutch with my mother, and me and my grandmother try to communicate with whatever little Sranan Tongo we know. The youngest children on my grandmother's compound ask where the planes are flying to, and since the only two answers are the US and the Netherlands, they believe these are places in the clouds.

I walk to the far end of the banana farm and out of the jungle emerge my mother and my grandmother, nudging me to follow them into the woods. I know these are not my mother and grandmother. They are just shapeshifters that lure you into the woods by taking the shape of someone you trust.

I say to them, "You are just Wewe Gombel, you will lure me into the jungle and leave me there lost. Go away."

They laugh and turn back around.

A little further away, my childhood friend is sitting by a creek in the back with feet in the water. I remember when we were little, he explained to me that he was a quarter Hindu, Chinese, African, and Native American. He said that up to his knees he was Hindu, but if he would go into the water he could become completely Hindu, or whichever of the four he chose.

He says to me now, "You are Boeroe and Javanese, but if you go into this creek you can be Indo, just one thing instead of two, but made up of two halves, one Dutch and one Indonesian. At the same time, you'll also be neither, something in between."

"Do I have to?" I ask.

"You don't have to, but you are lucky to have this opportunity."

The water is dark orange from the soil. I emerge from the bottom where the water is not a dark creek, but a koi pond with fake rocks and plants. It's cold and foggy here, just like a country in the clouds. There is a sign that says no fishing, no climbing in trees, and no running naked in the rain, and it makes me want to turn back.

We live in a two bedroom apartment in my aunt's name, my mother, my aunt, and my two cousins. There is a grass courtyard. Outside of this building, there are ghosts on bikes cycling between cypresses and windmills. They smile and wave at each other. Some of them taunt me. I'm starting to believe that in their large, empty, closed off houses, they are jealous of our cozy apartment and our large courtyard. They invite me to their large townhouse. They show me the libraries and pianos in their

# ALICE AMATI

homes and promise to teach me how to use them. There are paintings of themselves as ancient Roman emperors, but they say they are not about that. They are about a “feeling,” and I might not understand.\

Through their window I can see my own apartment building, its brick walls, windows, balconies, and satellite dishes make a pattern that seems to be dancing. It seems bigger too. Is it growing? Suddenly, there are apartment buildings as far as I can see. They have names now: The Austin, The Schwab House. I’m clearly in a different place. The people here smile a lot, but for some reason they scream. There is a statue of a lady holding a torch across the water, the noise of cars never stops. My phone magically tells me where each plant species I encounter is originally from.

“Many like you have moved here,” says a voice coming from loudspeakers.

Is it talking to the plants?

Everything changes quickly here. I can’t tell which are apartment buildings or loudspeakers. The round satellite dishes have all turned into soap bubbles and are multiplying. I’m in a bathtub now, in the middle of a jungle. I can smell and feel the temperature and humidity. My body knows it before I know it. My paternal grandfather and his cows are there. I say he should go to the Netherlands or the US sometimes. It’s easy, it’s just at the bottom of the creek. He shakes his head and says that I look pale and need to get some sun.



Miko Veldkamp, Tourist, 2023. Oil, acrylic and ink on linen, 30 x 40 inches. Courtesy the Artist. Photo: Greg Carideo.