

Joep van Lieshout: sculptor and visionary

Joep van Lieshout was accepted to the Rotterdam Academy of the Arts at sixteen years old. After graduating, he rose to fame quickly with projects that travelled between the world of easy and clean designs and the traditionally non-functional area of art, creating sculpture and installations, buildings and furniture, utopias and dystopias.

In 1995, Van Lieshout founded his studio, Atelier Van Lieshout, and has been working solely under the studio's name ever since. The studio moniker exists in Van Lieshout's practice as a methodology toward undermining the myth of the artistic genius. Over the past three decades, Van Lieshout has established a multidisciplinary practice that produces works on the borders between art, design, and architecture. By investigating the thin line between manufacturing art and mass-producing functional objects, he seeks to find the boundaries between fantasy and function, between fertility and destruction. Van Lieshout dissects systems, be it society as a whole or the human body; he experiments, looks for alternatives, takes exhibitions as experiments for recycling, and has even declared an independent state in the port of Rotterdam AVL-Ville (2001)—a free state in Rotterdam's harbors, with a minimum of rules, a maximum of liberties, and the highest degree of autarky. All of these activities are conducted within Van Lieshout's signature style of provocation—be it political or material.

Van Lieshout combines an imaginative aesthetic and ethic with a spirit of entrepreneurship; his work has motivated movements in the fields of architecture and ecology, and has been internationally celebrated, exhibited, and published. His works share a number of recurring themes, motives, and obsessions: systems, power, autarky, life, sex, and death—each of these trace the human individual in the face of a greater whole.

AVL-Ville was followed by Sportopia/Disciplinator (2002-2004), a series of installations built with scaffolding, a readymade non-design material, which explores the borders of freedom, discipline and community. The Organs series (2003-2007) focuses on the human body as the ultimate system while the Technocrat (2003-2005), features a closed circuit of food, alcohol, waste and biogas-energy, with humans as one of the cogwheels to make the giant machine work.

More recent projects include SlaveCity (2005-2008), a utopian project that is simultaneously carbon neutral, cultural, and hedonistic. Here, current ideas about ethics, aesthetics, food, energy, economics, management have been turned upside-down and reformulated, resulting in the design of an imaginary city of 200.000 inhabitants. At its core, SlaveCity is rational, efficient, and profitable. It is also the first 'zero energy' city—a green town, recycling everything, not wasting any of the world's resources, and completely self-sufficient. Cradle to Cradle, an installation from 2009, is a follow up to SlaveCity.

New Tribal Labyrinth (2010-ongoing), is representative of a more recent series of works by Van Lieshout, and reflects on the possible end of civilization as we know it. Our advanced society is extremely dependent on the current globalized economy with its complex relations and systems, and with over-consumption being the norm. Van Lieshout envisions and craves a return to simplicity, to industry and farming, to simple products with a passion for materials. He literally sculpts a new, simple way of living that he believes will blossom. The New Tribal Labyrinth presents the public with a vision of this possible future, an alternative society inhabited by imaginary tribes. This project focuses on the three main pillars of this tribal society, farming, industry and ritual objects, to become a 'Gesamtkunstwerk'.

Currently, Van Lieshout is working on a project that he is referring to as CryptoFuturism. With this body of work Van Lieshout revisits and challenges the ideas of Futurism a century later, to look at resonances between the societal threats faced in the early 20th century and the perhaps graver circumstances we face today. In parallel with the Futurists, with 'CryptoFuturism' he embraces and questions emerging technologies - from genetic manipulation to robotics and big data – and explores concepts like destruction, revolution and radical change as a means to create a new society.

Part of *CryptoFuturism* is the installation *The End of Everything*. *The End of Everything* consists of a series of raw, industrial artworks, functional machines like *The Roller*, *The Press*, *The Hammer* and *The Shredder*. These

machines were built to recycle, to destroy, to celebrate their power to demolish. They can be used for shredding, pressing, flattening and smashing everything ranging from consumer goods, scrap, Van Lieshout's own artworks even. With the remains, Van Lieshout intends to create raw materials, new objects and artworks. The industrial machines serve for both destruction and construction, and can simultaneously be regarded as a negative and a positive force, as a break from tradition and a change for the future.