



Fresh

JOEP VAN LIES- HOUT

*Rational
vs. irrational*

Dutch artist Joep van Lieshout (1963) is known far and wide for the groundbreaking work he has done in his chosen field. In 1995 Van Lieshout founded Atelier Van Lieshout (AVL), a successful multidisciplinary art studio encompassing installations, design, furniture and architecture. The artworks that Van Lieshout creates are practical, uncomplicated and substantial and vary from sculptures and furniture, bathrooms and mobile home units to large installations and complete architectural refurbishments. Works by the AVL studio can be found in private collections and museums all around the world.



Images left to right: Fertility Lamp (2009), Corpse Sofa (2009), Alfa & Omega - bus stop (2009), Whomb Hut (2006), Family Lamp (2008).

Your company is called Atelier Van Lieshout. How much of what you make is actually your work?

'This is actually something I need to set straight. We work with about twenty people here, which may give the impression that it is a collective, but it is actually Joep van Lieshout the artist, and the studio is here to help me to realise my art. I always make sketches of the work; sometimes my employees help me create what I design, and sometimes I do it myself. Of course there is some degree of cross-pollination and I draw inspiration from the creativity of my employees, but it is by no means a collective. Everything that leaves the AVL is a Joep van Lieshout.'

What defines a 'Joep van Lieshout'?

'That is something I never know before I start. I can only say that after I'm done. I like to keep my path clear; I don't want to prepare things. I want to allow my intuition to lead me, trusting that it will bring me to a place that I don't know yet. Hopefully, that place will be unfamiliar to a lot of other people too. It is a journey into the unknown, and I am inspired by my surroundings and the world along the way. When I look back, my work is almost always related to a function. A functional object, or something with a relation to a function, or the use of a function. Often my work is about an area of tension, poised between the rational and irrational, the society and the individual. It often also involves the ideal and anti-ideal worlds in which I live.'

Recurring themes in the work of AVL are self-sufficiency, power, politics and sex. What is the message behind your work?

'Although I don't really spell it out, I think there's a clear line

in my work that's extremely realistic. The work I make lies close to who I am. I am inspired by systems and the way things work, whether it is society, the economy or the human body. Systems are both good and bad. I think what will prevail in times to come is the way things are regulated nowadays. Regulation can lead to a situation in which no one gets the big picture anymore. We have a big government, and this system makes things complicated and expensive. What we do is we try to make our system perfect for everyone involved, but in the meantime we forget to work.'

How does that relate to your work?

'I think I have a gift for looking into the future and I want to depict this vision in my art. I think it could all go wrong. To what extent are we self-reliant, here in Europe? If one thing goes wrong, a plant disease for instance, everybody will go hungry and broke. Imagine what it would be like if there were no more oil; everybody would burn wood, and all the forests in Holland would be gone in just two days. When you are cold and hungry, you will reach for a weapon to survive. Some of the pieces I have been working on lately relate to this. Scenes of people fighting each other, battlefields.'

Do you feel that Holland suffers from excessive regulation as well?

'I think this is a real problem; we are dealing with a sort of prosperity disease. While we are so focused on refining and perfecting our society, we are losing a battle while other countries are taking over the basics. At some point, it will be too late. The fact that we don't really have industry or agriculture anymore in this country... I cannot imagine that we can grow enough food in Holland to provide for ourselves.



'We are dealing with a sort of prosperity disease'

Joep van Lieshout

I think we should go back to things like welding, grinding, making things.'

You once said: 'Each work of art is an individual work, but the work is also part of a bigger series of works. For me, all the work coming out of Atelier Van Lieshout tells one big saga.' What is that saga?

'It's a Gesamtkunstwerk, a composite work of art, and all of those works together tell a saga. That is the big storyline that runs through my work. It is extremely personal, both for me and for the observer of the work. For me, that narrative is my own position in the context of the society I live in. How I relate to that. And I think that everyone who likes to look at art can interpret it in his or her own way.'

What is your position in the context of society?

'It is very capricious. On the one hand I totally support freedom, while on the other hand I think freedom is not possible for everyone. I can think 'the more the merrier', and at the same time 'we could make do with only half the people that are here now...'

Are you politically active?

'No, I am not bothered by politics; I see all that as marketing. I am more interested in true power. The power to make the world a better place.'

As an artist, how do you feel about the business end of things?

'Atelier Van Lieshout is a company, but it is not a company just for the sake of being a company. AVL is something that enables me to make the things I want to make. When you work with

as many people as I do, you need a company structure; that is inevitable. Those are the rules of the game. But having the company is not the goal. The goal is to make good art.'

What kind of work do you enjoy most?

'I enjoy all sorts of different disciplines; they complete each other quite well. I make work that nobody asks for, work I make just because I want to, the real art. Besides that, I also do art-works on commission, and works for use in public spaces, as well as architecture and design projects. I can't make art seven days a week, so the diversity is nice.'

Do you have a favourite piece of work?

'It's always the last piece I am working on that's my favourite. That is what fascinates me most at that moment. The work that I come up with today is better than what I did yesterday. Of course this doesn't make sense, because in the end time will tell what was good or not.'

What does the future hold?

'I will expand and consolidate. I will continue making good art, and by doing so I will gain more influence and visibility, consolidating my base. I don't want to blow over; I want to keep improving each time. I want to raise the bar with each piece of art I make. I think the best is yet to come. I am a truck, a diesel lorry, not a sports car. But the most important thing for me is for my work to stay a challenge. Until now, I've always managed to find something that interests me, and I think I can keep going like that.'

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