



The impressive work of Harm van der Zeeuw

Piet Augustijn

Wherever they appear, Harm van der Zeeuw's work spontaneously attract attention. They are not normal everyday objects - usually items resembling vehicles in which certain parts appear familiar to us. But it is hard to explain what these works stand for, what they mean, where they come from.

Imaginative concepts like humour, life and movement are obviously present and marked with emphasis. Every piece looks as if it was made by a mysterious civilisation in a rudimentary workshop centuries ago, for the purpose of ... well, what exactly?

For transportation, making war, showing oneself. An indestructible force emanates from them. They are unknown, enigmatic, tough and robust-looking, but they are at the same time intimate and appealing.

The works usually have wheels. Superficially, one might assume that they are made of iron, steel or other materials. They are based on industrial components, engine parts (motors, spark plugs, cog wheels, exhaust systems, airscrews, winches, brake linings) and domestic appliances (vacuum cleaners, bottles). It is not so far fetched to think of metal.

But a closer look reveals that all of the components are made of ceramic material and have the external features of metal (colour, surface). Even the screws, nuts and rivets are made of clay.

All of these works express what they have gone through. Technique and creativity joined in monumental objects. This deceptive sense of authenticity is nothing new to ceramists.

Pablo Rueda Lara (1945-1993), who was born in Spain and worked for many years in Rotterdam, was a master in produc-



ing objects you had to touch to realise that they had been made of fired clay. They seemed to be made of cardboard, bronze, leather, textile or marble.

Mary Kershaw (1949) from England is a friend of van der Zeeuw and has worked form many years in her fantasy world inhabited by humans, animals, machines and industrial scrap.

Her sculptures reference the apocalyptic world of Hieronymus Bosch, and Celtic and mediaeval myths. In a mixture of clay and porcelain, but represented in great detail and realism. Harm van der Zeeuw goes one step further. In his studio, there are many old objects, engine parts and other useful compo-

opposite **"Time Traveler"** - 2014, 75 x 40 x 28 cm

above **"You Got To Move"** - 2010, 41 x 54 x 39 cm

photos – Hans van der Beele

nents. Sometimes they are there for a long time, sometimes only briefly.

When a new idea offers itself, the object is completely dismantled and the individual parts are made into moulds. New and/or different elements are added and the finished elements



above
below

"Picking Up The Pieces" - 2014, 37 x 38 x 24 cm
"Who Let The Dog Out" - 2013, 64 x 38 x 32 cm

photo – Hans van der Beele
photo – Hans van der Beele



become a completely new work where the original form is still recognisable but it is transformed into a vehicle or other object that has never before existed.

Van der Zeeuw has created a wide ranging body of work over the years. He works in series: women, sentinels, rowers, bowls, towers, machines. The objects in a series vary in execution and form but have some features in common.

He mainly creates (Nubian) women with tall, exotic headgear. Women row boats on wheels; horses are seated together with humans in a cart, a bird sits in a time machine, birds sit in a mincer or turn wheels: a trompe l'œil effect.

The positive feedback he received at pottery markets confirmed his belief that he was on the right track, but he wanted more. This was why he began to present his work to a different public in galleries.

Built in 1964 (the year of his birth): objects that are recognisable as "van der Zeeuws" because of their aura and their technical perfection. A new theme is introduced: the linkage between humans and technology, or rather, humans in the stranglehold of technology.

Vehicles, ships, flying machines and devices such as Time Traveler (2014) on the basis of an old vacuum cleaner. Who Let the Dog Out? (2013) based on an old gas bottle. Women on a Mission (2012) with cogwheels and rods. Picking up the Pieces (2014), an old mincer on wheels, and Trojaan (2012), a war chariot.

"I find inventing, developing and making the objects very important. Sometimes I already have the title in mind and I start working, but usually the title comes afterwards. Sometimes I ask for suggestions for titles on Facebook, because people often have the best ideas on the work they see.

"Travelling, time, other cultures, old machines and music (lyrics) are important parts of my work. I try to introduce a theme into my development work, but I do not want to cling to it rigidly. Going out, to see a themed exhibition for instance, has to remain possible.

"Apart from the devices and machines I have already mentioned, I draw inspiration from everywhere: films, books, paintings (Jeroen Bosch is a welcome source), travel and other cultures."

Piet Augustijn is editor-in-chief of *Keramiek*, the magazine of the Dutch ceramists organisation, NVK



"Black Birds" - 2014, 13 x 10 x 10 cm photo – Hans van der Beele

Harm van der Zeeuw (born in 1964) grew up in the Maas region. He started as a baker, qualified with the guild and at an early stage became a faithful visitor to Keramisto in Milsbeek and the open days at ceramics studios in the vicinity. He was attracted to the cheery individualists who worked there. After a number of detours, he arrived at the Nuance ceramics factory, part of the Weinerberger group, where he discovered his interest in heavy clay ceramics. This gave him the opportunity to ease himself into his current position of part-time quality manager. He trained as a skilled ceramist and as a ceramics trainer. At the age of 37, he took the first steps in his new career as a ceramic artist. A new world opened up to him. For over a year, he studied under Toon Thijs (1948) in Nijmegen, then with firing expert Ed Knoops (1953), who convinced him that he should take part in pottery markets. On his debut in Dwingeloo (2008), he received the prize for emerging artists. The judges praised his originality, his rigorous pictorial language, his humour and his professionalism. When he first exhibited at Keramisto, a dream was fulfilled. He later won the judges' prize at the pottery market in Raeren and received nominations in Gouda and Swalmen. Last year he took part in the Westerwald Prize Competition for European Ceramics, and in the accompanying exhibition at the Keramikmuseum in Höhr-Grenzhausen, his piece Time Traveller is on display. Harm van der Zeeuw is involved heart and soul with his work in the ceramics industry, but he also experiments with clay to his heart's content, trying to give shape to his ideas. He is unbeatable at it. His sculptures are surprising and are highly esteemed; they find widespread interest. They cannot be explained and seem to come from a different world. They command attention and have a definite presence, they are earthy, heavy and impressive.

photo – Hans van der Beele



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