

Tilt of Looking

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He is building a large time mechanism in Dordrecht and is working on a huge camera obscura for the beach at Terschelling. This installation can be climbed and experienced during Oerol. Artist Arjen Boerstra loves disruptive projects. Amid the metal and wooden scale models of current and future installations, he talks about his work: "I really like to take things out of their context and show them from a different perspective."

Rarely seen art that is as humorous as that of Arjen Boerstra. On the DVD that is included with his book "Observations and events" is the movie "Cycling." From the shadows created by the low sun, you can deduce what is happening.



"By explicitly involving reality in the things I make, people can experience my work easily."

There is a cyclist, Boerstra, who cycles through a bare winter landscape and pulls a cart. On that cart stands a high pole to which a camera is attached. The cyclist and the landscape are filmed from

above. Because the camera has a fisheye lens, the image is strongly distorted. The landscape has taken the form of a globe in which the cyclist has a huge presence. He does not cycle through the landscape, he cycles over the globe, where the world coincides with the bare fields on the left and right of the road. Nothing is said, there is no music, there is only the sound of the wind and the bicycle tires on the road. It takes two minutes and forty seconds. It could just as well have been shorter or longer. It has no beginning or end and there is no reason. The title also does not help you to explain something. It is what it is and as a viewer you figure it out. Delicious.

Ancient but current

Boerstra's book is called "Observations and Events." That sounds like it's a collection of recordings of what the artist has seen around him. He was like an outsider. But as the movie "Cycling" already shows, Boerstra creates the events himself. He also stages the perception. At the same time, he is a set piece in the event as a maker. And then there is the distortion of the world in which the action takes place. It is one big game with the expectations of the spectator.

"I really like taking things out of context and showing them from a different perspective," says Boerstra. "Humor is a tool used to get people interested in the other perspective. It makes it possible to think a little further than one would normally do. In this case you might look at a landscape differently, you experience its beauty in a new way. And then of course there is the absurdism that characterizes such a video. You could see it as a commentary on all those things we do without much thinking day after day. "

"I don't have a message and I have no illusion to improve the world. I just want people to wonder once in a while, to be equally aware of the world around them: their environment, the landscape, the way in which they live their lives. "

Another example of a play with contexts. Arjen Boerstra has recently been driving a car with a sign called "Boerstra Engineering".

"Very soon there was a representative at my door who wanted to sell me all kinds of technical materials. When we were talking outside, we saw more and more cars passing by with the same type of sign on it. I said: maybe they are all artists who have gone undercover just like me. Maybe everyone plays just as much a play as I do. I like the sort of tilt of looking and it is also quite interesting. Are things the way they seem? An ancient but extremely universal theme. "

Human size

As a matter of fact, it is not that strange for Boerstra to identify as an engineer. In his studio, which is primarily a workplace, everything reminds of building, technology, hammering, sawing and screwing. He has just bought a huge collection of meccano, with thousands of bolts and nuts, corner pieces, gears ... And he has already made a couple of working machines with it, sometimes models for projects to be carried out later. Such models are also made of wood, like the one of the tower he will make for Oerol later this year.

"I think craftsmanship is very important. For me it has to do with the desire for times when the world was still designed to the human dimension. A world in which people were still able to build their houses, boats and flying machines with some wood, cloth and rope. The sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, kind of.

"I don't like the way things are now. I find it terrible that you can no longer even replace the battery of your mobile phone yourself and that you have to go to the garage for a new headlight. I comment on modern times by showing that things can be done very differently. Not by kicking around, but by building things that give people the feeling that they can make them themselves. I want to say that it is up to the people themselves to determine how dependent they are on regular and how self-reliant they are. "

The consolation of the Christmas ball effect

Boerstra has built several boats made of plywood, he devised a capsule with which he could go into the water and up into the air, and also built a mobile chip shop stall with which he stood on the beach on Oerol.

The last project resulted in a beautiful video: a beach that was abandoned by God and everyone with that lonely fries stand while no one came. "That was very absurd," says Boerstra. "Standing there being the lonely fries baker during a busy festival. I hadn't planned it this extreme, but it was wonderful for the film. "

"The fact that I treat myself to a find is an important function of art for me. But as a spectator you can also benefit from it. "

Now Boerstra is building for Oerol again, the model is on the work table. It is reminiscent of Panorama Mesdag in its form. But the visual effect is very different, he says.

"From my movie "Cycling" I learned that a fisheye lens did not give optimum results. As a classically trained landscape painter, I think that a landscape should consist of one third of land and two thirds of air. That was reversed in "Cycling". I then started looking further and came across the Christmas ball print by the artist Escher: that Christmas ball reflects everything. So when I mounted a Christmas ball above the camera, I got that classic layout again. I also use that effect on Oerol. "

At the Seinpaalduin in Terschelling, the highest point of the island, Boerstra wants to create "a great moment" in the history of the landscape experience. He is going to build a tower there - the Camera Batavia Test Tower, a kind of preliminary study for the definitive Camera Batavia, which will be a giant camera obscura - in which people see themselves and the surrounding landscape in a completely different way than they are used to, namely as a sphere mirror image. But a comprehensive picture. "That's it, nothing more. It is a new kind of reality that I might hope will give people a little comfort. Just as you can be comforted by the landscapes of the Hague School. But as a viewer it is easy to look at a painting, for this you have to put some effort in it.

'I don't have a message, I don't have the illusion to improve the world, I just want people to wonder once in a while, to be equally aware of the world around them: their environment, the landscape, the things they use and the way they do it. "

Hook up and release

People will also be surprised by his new installation in Dordrecht. Boerstra has made a time mechanism in a large former factory hall that sets a round table in motion. On that table are fragments of magnets and above it hangs a needle, like the ones that are used to stop socks. The needle is set in motion by the magnets that move with the table: attraction and repulsion, in an endless circulation. And between those moments of attraction and repulsion, he swings back and

forth, searching.

"I was in a retirement home recently and it was full of huge clocks. I find that so strange. Poor people, I thought. But it gave me the idea to do something with time. I first made a clock mechanism from meccano - old toys and movement, then you have the time - and then translated that model into a huge thing of wood that looks a bit like the mechanism of Eise Eisinga in Franeker in the Netherlands. My mechanism moves, luckily to the irritation of many visitors, very slowly. And then there's that needle that just wiggles there.

I surprised myself with the idea of this installation. That is an important function of art for me to treat myself to a find. But as a spectator you can also benefit from it. You can relate many aspects of life to it if you want: people who are looking for something to hold on to, keep losing their way, doubting, hoping over and over again or hoping cheerfully from event to event ... But you can project whatever you want to. "

Non-elitist

The art of Arjen Boerstra may seem a bit disruptive, it is anything but inaccessible. That was done deliberately.

"I grew up practically without culture, in my youth nobody taught me how to look at art or what I could experience from it. It took me a lot of time and effort to fix that. That is why I think it is important that my work is accessible. By explicitly involving reality in the things I make, people can easily build a bridge to my art. My work is easy to experience, also for myself. "

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