

It's here already. The only thing you have to do is agree with it.



Henk Visch is known as a reclusive sculptor, and an artist with a gift for subtly manipulating the properties of spaces. Nishizawa Ryue meanwhile is a rising star in architectural design whose projects range from art museums to housing, focusing on what happens in these spaces, and the relationships within them and with the surrounding environment. This conversation between the pair, first connected when Visch staged an exhibition at Nishizawa's Moriyama House compound in Tokyo, took place just as Visch was opening a solo show in the Japanese capital, and Nishizawa had been awarded the Pritzker Prize. Moving beyond the confines of their respective domains, they discussed their different approaches to the challenge of creative work.

by Pamela Miki

Nishizawa Ryue: Congratulations on your show here in Tokyo; it's full of pleasant surprises. The figures I am more familiar with, but the linear constructions strike me as a new direction. The largest of those works [*I have seen real happiness nowhere, but it is doubtless here* (2010)] looks almost like a gate and at the same time an abstract drawing. What inspired this direction?

Henk Visch: In David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* there is a cave drawing that takes on great importance because it contains a secret: if you can understand the drawing, you will know who killed Laura. As I was working on this piece I thought, this is like a cave drawing - you can read it, but you don't know what it means.



(Left) *I have seen real happiness nowhere, but it is doubtless here* 2010 Metal, h210 cm (Right) *I was in your dream and could not sleep*, 2010

© Henk Visch Courtesy Wako Works of Art

NR: So if we can read the work, we'll know who killed Laura? (Laughs)

HV: (Laughing) There are no words or no literal meaning that you can find; it is more about language, about the idea of reading. And yes, it is like a gate - a gate you can go through with your eyes, but not with your body. In that sense it is similar to the work it stands juxtaposed to in this show. In *I was in your dream and could not sleep* (2010) the two bronze figures are the same - they are from the same mold - and the pole in the center acts as a mirror. In the mirror things become virtual; they disappear.

NR: The mirror creates another wall behind the wall, another space behind the space. Still these two works strike me as very different.

HV: To me the figures are solitary entities. They are closed, restricted, self-contained. They try to hide themselves in themselves, but they cannot hide anything more. They are antisocial, egocentric; they have no sensitive parts, no surface you can enter - and they need space. So by making the linear constructions, which to me are like space, I give the figures the space they lack.

Any space can be a space for art

NR: My first contact with your work was the piece you made in collaboration with Rem Koolhaas for the Kunsthal Rotterdam, which he of course designed. What struck me was what a beautiful feeling - a

sense of serenity - it brought to the architecture. It created a different world. And yet it simply consists of two figures walking - a man and a camel.



Kameel met begeleider (1992), Kunsthall Rotterdam © Henk Visch

HV: I made that piece in the early '90s, when there was a big influx of people from Islamic countries to the Netherlands, and with it a lot of social tension. Since it was a public sculpture, I decided to incorporate this issue into the piece. I likened the figures to ships, playing off of the saying 'the camel is the ship of the desert'. And this being Holland, I had the camel going towards the sea - integrating with society, so to speak. The funny thing is that around that time when Rem made a catalogue for his Villa Dall'Ava project in Paris, he hired animals as models for the photographs.

NR: Yes, I remember that catalogue, with the giraffe in the garden. It was odd indeed to see a giant beast standing in a residential garden. You obviously inspired him. Did you work very closely with Rem on the Kunsthall project?

HV: Rem was instrumental to the art project because he was on the jury for the commission, which I won because Rem was very much in favor of my proposal. My original idea was to have a blue square around the entire Kunsthall, like a sea, and in the blue square, a camel - but the city opposed it. So Rem and I then worked together on developing the new approach.

NR: I was unaware of the original concept. It's a beautiful idea.

HV: But then it went to sea (laughs). Sometimes you have to lose something first, in order to win.

NR: At the Moriyama House exhibition the architectural space and the artworks forged a very happy relationship. In fact, it was one of the most impressive ways of using the space I'd ever seen. The building had originally been designed as a residence, but you changed the program completely: you made it a museum. You placed works in what I had designed to be a small bathroom and kitchen in such a way that they took on a different function. It demonstrated exquisitely that any space can be a museum, that any space can be a space for art.





Installation views of *Henk Visch at Moriyama House* 2006
 © Henk Visch Courtesy Wako Works of Art
 Read Visch's text on the Moriyama House and exhibition at

HV: But there was one space in the Moriyama House that I didn't want to use: the space with no door, that Mr Moriyama uses to listen to music, with just a rectangular opening.

NR: (Laughs) That's the door.

HV: Oh!? (Laughs) What is a classic piece of cultural misinterpretation! I felt it was a space that I should keep to remember space. It seemed like a prototype for all the other buildings, and I thought it should never be lost in using. Sometimes I think houses need is a place where you never go.

NR: A place where you never go - that's a nice idea.

Henk Visch

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Henk Visch: I have seen happiness nowhere, but it is doubtless here

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Wako Works of Art (Tokyo)

<http://www.wako-art.jp/>

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 Setouchi International Art Festival 2010

19 July - 31 October

Teshima, Kagawa

<http://setouchi-artfest.jp/>

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Horizontal/vertical/revolving: the artist and architect's senses of space

HV: I went to Naoshima five years ago, alone, and I was amazed when I saw the ferry park, not knowing at the time that SANAA had designed it. What impressed me was that I felt it had reintroduced the horizontal to our world. We need the horizontal to move, not the vertical; we use the vertical to stay. In a city like Tokyo, it's a vertical life, a vertical world. But with your work I feel that you've given the horizontal back to urban society.



SANAA *Marine Station Naoshima* ©SANAA

NR: I think that's true. The buildings in the vicinity of the ferry park are at maximum two stories, and the majority just one story. The environment is very different to an urban setting: you look out at sea, sky and islands - that's what inspired this approach. The appeal of the horizontal that you pointed out in your observations about directional space was the appeal we observed in the town and the sea, and we decided to create that architecturally.

On the other hand, the work [*There* (2006)] you did for the VIVO City shopping complex in Singapore, designed by Ito Toyo, addresses vertical space in an interesting way.

HV: That was challenging project for me, because I was given the highest floor. I thought, This is the top, how can there be more? There's no next floor. And it's mostly kids that go up there. I puzzled over how to 'finish' because anything I would do would be the highest point of the building. I struggled with this idea of...

NR: How to finish the building? (Laughs)



Left: Henk Visch *There* 2006

Right: Henk Visch *Think* 2005 Installation view at Wako Works of Art

© Henk Visch Courtesy Wako Works of Art

HV: Precisely! And in the end I decided to make a revolving figure, that is, to create no fixed ending. So it would not become a point that says, 'Here is the end.' It would turn the space back upon itself. And it works. So I am very happy about it. It inspired me to write a little text about 'here and there'.

Accepting what is

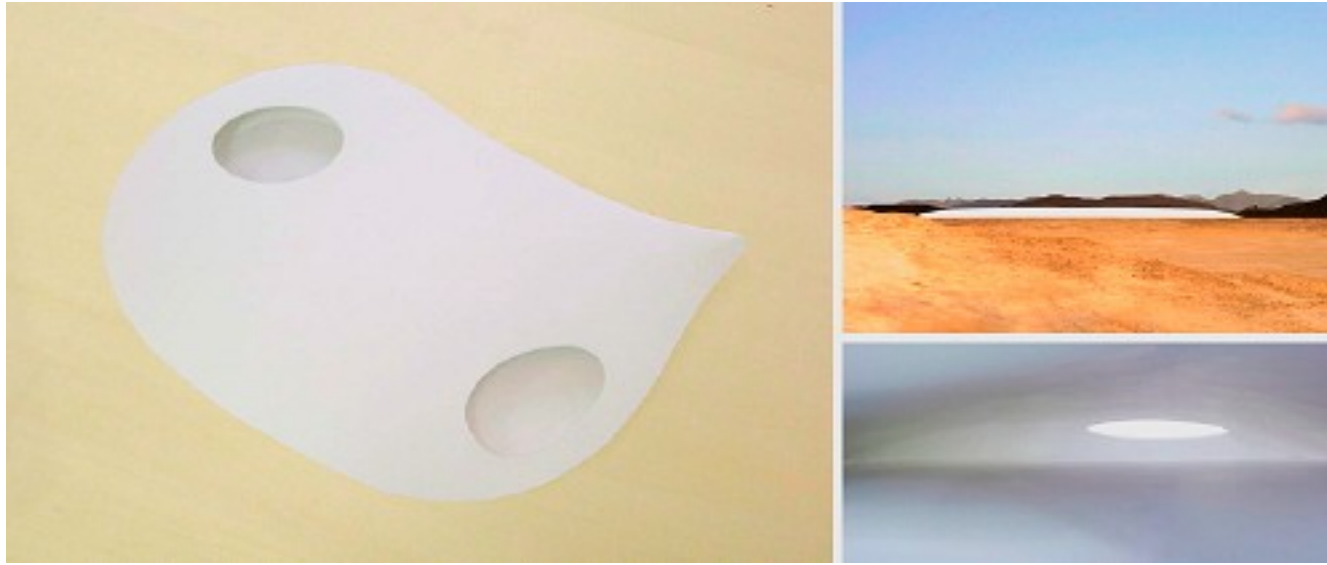
NR: Coming back to your show here in Tokyo, you've transformed even the exterior space. I'd remembered that gallery has a parking space out front, so I came today by car, but as I was pulling in I saw your sculpture, [*Think* (2005)] and once again was astonished by how it changed the function of the space completely.

HV: Because it mimics human behavior. I'm very interested in the public - partly because I don't feel very public myself. I always try to sense somebody in the public, to project what that person sees and perceives; I try to look at my own work with the eyes of an anonymous person.

NR: To me *Think* is public, but also very private - I feel there are some very private stories behind it. All of your works, in fact, are very cute, very lovely, but at the same time, very scary. It's rather amazing to see these two totally different qualities come together with no contradiction.

HV: No contradiction, I like that. We have this idea of a goal, which is a form of convergent perspective, but I think as an artist, in order to be able to accept and digest things, you also have to have a divergent perspective. Which is like Asian perspective isn't it?

NR: It may be. The Japanese sensibility, at any rate, doesn't really embrace a sense of so-called 'perspective'; it is basically flat. There isn't the kind of dramatic space that converges to one point. It's more diffusely organized, more prosaic.



Nishizawa Ryue *Teshima Museum* (planned opening 2010) © Office of Ryue Nishizawa

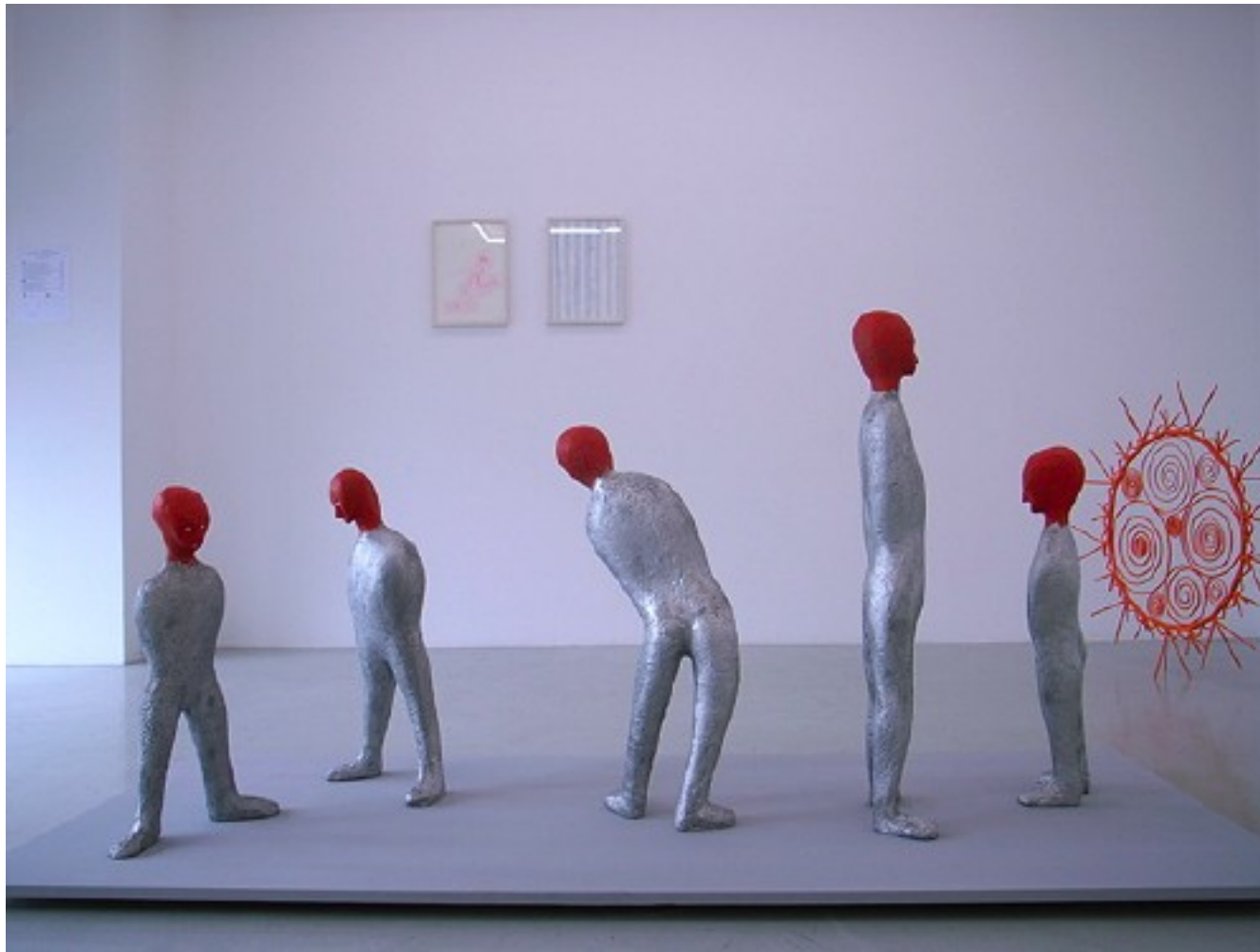
HV: While Western perspective converges to one point, which is probably Jesus. This morning I went to an exhibition of Korean ceramics where I read as perspective what was actually Korean letterforms. My Western eyes are predisposed to see perspective. But I've learned by being in Asia, and my exposure to your works, to disengage somewhat from this view.

NR: To me your works feel very European. The way the emotions come into play feels very mature.

HV: Mature, I don't know, but I am very European. It's one of those things that I have to accept. And though I don't like to think or say so, I am also very Christian, even though I am not a Christian believer - I have no religion. But I realize that my figures are very Christian figures. My hope is to be more free from fixed ideas. But we are educated in a language, and words are loaded with cultural ideas. Take *sin* for example, or shame, or guilt - concepts I don't even want to think about! I don't use those words when I speak myself, but they are in me, like my bones. They are part of my heritage.

NR: When I was younger, I didn't really care about where I belonged, but once I started travelling abroad, everybody kept referring to me as Japanese. At first it didn't even ring true, but after hearing it again and again and again, I began to think, hey, maybe I am (laughs). Fortunately, I now have a better understanding of my origins and the context in which I grew up. I am also very aware of the way things Japanese - the seasons, the flora, the climate, and even the food - influence my work.

The world already exists



Installation view of Henk Visch's exhibition *I have seen real happiness nowhere, but it is doubtless here* at Wako Works of Art

NR: Architects normally approach a project in light of the program requirements and the existing environment, or the site. The site is a given. The project comes to the site. We create something new based on an existing context. I sensed a similar attitude in your work about respecting the existing property, about relating to the existing context.

HV: Yes, that's true of my public works. But in my studio works the existing context is generally immaterial. My site is not sand or stone, but rather ideas and traditions. And that's something I adore about art: that you are not like a zombie or alien from outer space, but that you are part of a tradition. Although I work freely - I don't consider myself a traditional artist - I am aware of tradition. There is such a long tradition in images. People have been visualizing their ideas ever since they started to think. So this is the site that I excavate.

I read somewhere - and this interests me greatly - that if you speak it is in fact thanks to language. So whatever I say means that I agree with language. The notion of agreeing, of accepting, is also very much something I am aware of - that I have to agree with what is. And that attitude is reflected in the lines from Voltaire's science fiction short story 'Micromégas' that I chose as the title of this show: 'I have seen happiness nowhere, but it is doubtless here'. It's here already. The only thing I have to do is agree with it.

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