

# Contemporary artist Henk Visch

6 months ago

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Contemporary artist Henk Visch looks back on his creative journey since 1979 in a free flowing conversation with the Asian Curator.





Although I attended Art school at the Royal Academy of Art and Design in s'Hertogenbosch (NL) in the late sixties and that I finished in 1972 during a time I enjoyed so much and really matured as a person, yet I did not develop any interest of showing my work in any way or making exhibitions. This was all natural for those days. Art was a tool for self-reflection that could well lead to other things than a career in the art world.

Friends became house owners, antique dealers or teachers or decided to embark for a world trip and some never came back. And I wrote short stories and poetry, made drawings and wanted to make a film. I was active and played the hurdy-gurdy in a "Street Theatre" group and worked in a piano restoration workshop, all of which luckily coincided with my musical interest having played violin from as young as my fifth year on.

Now that I think about it : The violin gave me peace during my childhood, being part of a family of 5 kids and it gave me freedom in the mind. Being able to extract sounds out of this beautiful made and elegant shaped wooden box with strings touching them with a horse-hair spanned bow, gave me full satisfaction and a feeling of power that is very helpful when one grows up in a world where the children had to cope with parents that did their best to make something of a future out of the silent echoes of the Second World War that still sounded in the social fabric of the young families, as well as in the society at large covered by a sticky dust that was not easy to remove.

My father was an engineer working for Philips Industries. He had one glass eye that he put out in the evening and put in again in the morning. Streets were empty, houses were cold, food was eaten without words. My parents worried about my future, I had to cope with acne and became a lonely youngster at highschool. How different from the happiness of the first day at the Art school in Den Bosch, I was 19 years and I remember it so well.

In due time this feeling of happiness slowly transformed into an alertness that sharpened my observations and strengthened my self awareness, it constructed a mindset that made me a witness of myself and the world. It build fundament that still hold me in a good place and which stayed with me ever since.



With 29 years I sold my car and bought an airplane ticket to New York.

**A friend had told me “New York is the eye of the world”. This was in 1979.**

I wanted to meet the people Diana Arbus had captured with her lens: to see what she saw. “There is a difference between what people want you to see of them ; what they show and what you actually see”. I was interested in the gap between intention and effect. I was interested in the fact that when we look into the face of people we meet, we see part of ourselves. The face of someone else can become a mirror of ourselves. We feel a connection and feel free at the same time.

Yes it was like that: I was part of the world, included and was much more than myself . I stayed in a hotel at Washington Square and saw the square covered with snow exactly as in the photographs of André Kertész. I walked the streets at night and I wrote in my diary :” I have found an entrance to the world”.

When I came back in the Netherlands, I looked for a studio where I could make sculpture, I was full with energy and had the feeling that I could make everything I wanted. That is what I did. Then I organized my first show and wrote a promotional text for the local newspaper which was not published. My life and the world became intertwined . I met colleagues and made friends.

I do have a huge respect for artists -principally- because they all do things nobody orders them to do. Artists do not obey others or follow orders. They all have a place in their mind where a little voice is whispering, it tells me what to do.

I listen with my eyes closed. All the artists have this sort of “humming friends” and they all

meet at night and discuss the things that are important for the next day.



If you want a career in art you must -among other things- learn to feel at ease in lonely places, where you can find out what you want to say to others. Then everybody you speak to, can become a friend.....never think about business, management, PR or efficiency. Give more then you take; add time to time, be courageous but gentle; sleep well; go by feet, barefoot or fly but always respect the hesitation and slowness when things are unfolding.

The Estate Henk Visch is a dream came true. It is my conviction that Art is a Public Good, a product not of an individual but of a society. It speaks through the individual about general things and should be visible and experienced without any barriers because it belongs to society. Exhibitions are very important because it is the moment the artwork is presented. It becomes a gift to the onlooker. Museums should provide free entrance so that when it rains parents that collect their children from school can come in and wait for the rain to stop. In the mean time the kids are hypnotised by something hanging on the wall or in the other room lies on the floor. Something is born. Art is a cultural phenomenon that still has active residues that originated in the prehistoric gift-culture.

I am lucky enough to sell my work every now and then, so I can continue to make new works and be able to make exhibitions.

I started collecting when I had time to look and money to spend.

My own endeavor has its limitations and borders. Thus I can step out of my limited world and enter another. Yesterday I met a art student and looking at her work I asked her; What is happening in your work? She looked at me and said: Desire. Of course I knew but I could not have said that. Sometimes you need someone else to say what you think. That is the

power of art; It shows you what you already knew but was not aware of.



Jan Hoet , the museum director from Belgium and Director of Dokumenta IX , 1992 Kassel, with whom I collaborated in several occasions could reach out to many sorts of people. He convinced politicians to come to openings and changed potential collectors into real collectors. Art became popular by him !An enlarged playing field for art emerged .But always was the artist in the center of his actions and considerations.

So many artists were lifted up by his relentless search for the magic power that he presumed and rightly so, in a work of the art.

Joan Jonas invited me in 2002 to play in her Performance “Lines in the Sand” .A whole new world of words and gestures embedded in rituals with props of glass and stuffed objects from all around the world catapulted me in riddles and mystereis and where little things , i found out , played a major role and meaning could pop up in every moment. I remember a line I had to say in the play :”She is both phantom and reality “

I participated in 1993 with Jimmy Durham and Ilja Kabakov in the Show :”Rendez – Vous” ( The appointment) in Gent organised by Jan hoet. Jimmy was telling stories of his youth and Ilja Kabakov was humming during work while my wife was breast feeding our newborn. It was a celebration. The exhibition grew and was shaped all by itself it seemed. Many things can grow in peace time peace.

Franz Ehrhard Walter shaped my ideas about art and reality. He looked at the painted illusion on the canvas and turned it the around. At the backside there is the unprepared rough material. Franz Ehrhard Walter started working with this raw linen fabric as new found material stripped from its former function as bearer of illusion.

The linen fabric became functional and essential for a social world he envisioned and where reality ruled, and ideology and symbols were replaced by encounters and movements and people take responsibility for their own actions. Art became “real” in social life.

At the moment I am busy and work quite nervously on a solo show for Tim Van Laere Gallery which opens Januari 21, 2021, in Antwerpen Belgian. The Gallery is very dear to me for many good reasons.

The covid 19 area will force all people to think anew about the values in our lives and we have to do something in these not so stable political times. Of course I worry a lot as I have no god to pray to.

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