

2001

'Ubu Roy'

A work of art by Ronald Cornelissen, commissioned by Stichting Beeldspoor for the Rotterdamse Schouwburg.

Along the monumental stairs to the Grote Zaal of the Rotterdamse Schouwburg, a collection of art-works is presented, produced for the project Beeldspoor. This exhibition includes works by Philip Akkerman, Marjolein van den Assem, Rob Birza, Paul Blanca, Rineke Dijkstra, Jan Fabre, Matthieu Ficheroux, JCJ Vanderheyden, Herman Helle, Henri Jacobs, Aglaia Konrad, Axel van der Kraan, Inez van Lamsweerde, Joep van Lieshout, Reinier Lucassen, Bas Meerman, Pieter Laurens Mol, Marc Mulders, Erwin Olaf, Willem Oorebeek, Hermann Pitz, Charly van Rest, Wim T. Schippers, Han Schuil, John van 't Slot, Jean-Marc Spaans, Peter Struycken, Joost Swarte, Lidwien van de Ven, Emo Verkerk, Hans Verwey, Peter Vos, Co Westerik and Dirk Wiarda. Since March 2001, the collection is now enriched by a work of Ronald Cornelissen (1960): 'Ubu Roy'.

"Ronald Cornelissen is a Rotterdam artist who, alas, allows his visual work to be polluted by various musical influences". As Radio Rijnmond observed - not without irony (7-10-1998). The tradition providing the source of Cornelissen's inspiration is the intriguing twilight zone between the avant-garde and the underground: Ubu Roi meets Killroy, Brion Gysin meets William S. Burroughs, Mike Kelley meets Ronald Cornelissen. "I was first into music and only later discovered the visual arts", says Cornelissen. "Pop music shaped my aesthetic. Through the music I discovered Burroughs, started reading more, got hooked on fanzines and underground comics, and it was in those circles that I got to know visual artists".

It is no surprise that Cornelissen's work stays true to the media promoted by international pop culture: collage, comics, cartoons, fanzines, graffiti, street poetry, performance, installations, noise and psychedelica. His piece for Beeldspoor is likewise filled with references to the all-pervasiveness of popular culture in our society. His collage breathes the fourth dimension of Alfred Jarry, who's rancid hero Pere Ubu carved his signature into the genetic make-up of every underground hero of the twentieth century. Like Killroy, the virtual patron-saint of ecstasy, but cast in a mismatched body, complete with enormous nose, that seems to accentuate the libido and physicality of the rock star. The prompt box also recalls the intense avant-garde debate that has demythologized the art-world for good: the problematic divide between spectator and performer.

The reality of that divide, rather, is the essence of all subcultures (for, surely, the collective re-experience of an event is subcultural), while the more established art world still plays with such dated ideas as 'reaching the public' and 'participation'.

For the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Destroy All Monsters (with Mike Kelley, Jim Shaw and Cary Loren), Cornelissen, in collaboration with Ben Schot, organized a unique workshop in Rotterdam, with the participation of a score of artists and musicians from Rotterdam and Detroit (1998). He also introduced the notorious noiseband annex performers Princess DragonMom to the Netherlands and toured in their company through the United States and Japan. Just as Killroy, peeping over the prompt box, rolls spectator

and performer into one, so Ronald Cornelissen (in all imaginable outfits and guises) confirms the noise-spectacle to which Princess DragonMom owes its fame.

In addition he publishes the international comics-magazine Wormhole, and has built a 'trashy' zen-garden (Zen Arcade) in the Rotterdamse Schouwburg. But the musical or sonic element is always present in his work. Rather, it concerns soundscapes, says Cornelissen, that summon up atmospheres intended as settings for his images: "Sound is always suggestive". From the perspective of the subculture, his collage for Beeldspoor is of special value. Perhaps Jarry and Kilroy are whispering to us (or is it prompting?) that the real theatre is happening outside the playhouse doors. Maybe his work is evidence of a wish for theatre at last to celebrate joyously the ditching of the dividing line between high and low culture.

In any case, one thing is clear:

RONALD CORNELISSEN WAS HERE!

Translated by Ronald Cornelissen