

HAPPY INDUSTRY

The crafting of waste

Joep van Lieshout founded the AVL studio group in Rotterdam in 1995, where the company continues to design and fabricate their widely exhibited works. The more recent AVL-Mundo foundation has since been formed, with a view to establishing a cultural hub in the city. Occupying industrial buildings in the old harbour area, it is a visionary concept that promises to contain external and internal spaces for the exposition of works that involve industrial processes. So far, the public has been very receptive, and there is no sign of that changing. In fact, as the project evolves, things are looking ever happier.

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ALL IMAGES: AVL-MUNDO'S HAPPY INDUSTRY, ROTTERDAM, 2014





Over the course of one weekend in mid-September 2014, a neo Industrial Revolution was ignited in Rotterdam. It was a revolution celebrating the beauty – and ugliness – of industrial production, aiming at a new world order in which society is inhabited by self-sufficient tribes, with mankind returning to farming and industry, and re-establishing our relationship with materials.

The initiator is Joep van Lieshout, a Dutch artist and the founder of Atelier Van Lieshout. "In my opinion," he explains, "things went wrong in the second half of the 20th century, when we in the West found out that we could outsource production to other countries where everything was cheaper – resources, labour, and finished products, as well. Firstly, we outsourced our industries to low-cost countries. Then we banished agriculture from view, with megastables situated in an anonymous, generic countryside. And all that is left in the West is a sterile urban society where service industries dominate. We have become a society of consultants, lawyers, and advertising firms. From my point of view, that is not right. Society should comprise of both beauty and ugliness, good and bad: industries and services, agriculture and cities, prostitutes, addicts, and madmen – everything. Thankfully, the more recent years have seen a renewed interest in production, but there is still a long way to go."

The beginning of the process towards Joep van Lieshout's new world order, which goes under the name of New Tribal Labyrinth, was triggered on 12/13/14 September 2014, when the artist presented his large-scale installation Happy Industry: a mobile foundry dedicated to the melting and casting of various metals. On that occasion, a temporary industrial zone called AVL-Mundo was set-up in the Museumpark in Rotterdam, and a group of artists was invited to experiment with the machinery by casting, melting, and forging using recycled metals from the city's rubbish dump.

"AVL-Mundo is a foundation I started in 2009 with the idea of supporting culture in Rotterdam. To achieve this goal, we are currently working on the creation of a new cultural hub here. This hub, located in a series of old industrial buildings in the former harbour area, will feature a large exhibition space, a sculpture park, and an open depot with works by Atelier Van Lieshout. Additionally, AVL-Mundo organises cultural events, festivals, and off-site presentations – like Happy Industry last September", informs the artist.

Among those who took part in the Happy Industry performance were Belgian sculptor Peter Rogiers, who created a large relief; Italian artist Rossella Biscotti & Kevin van Braak from the Netherlands,

DJ Wooldrik (1)
 Anna Milner (2)
 Atelier Van Lieshout (3)
 DJ Wooldrik (4)

Facing page:
 Atelier Van Lieshout (1)
 DJ Wooldrik (2/3/4)



who worked on a number of smaller pieces for their on-going project; and Dutch designer Frederik Molenschot, who tried his hand at a large sculptural project. "However," Joep van Lieshout comments, "the primary goal was to experiment, to learn about industrial processes, to reintroduce industry into the heart of the city. Even if the artworks did not turn out as planned, the result was successful."

Public response was enthusiastic. Thousands of visitors attended the weekend event – both art lovers and the general public – and had the chance to gain an insight into the normally very closed-off goings-on in the artist's studio, and were able to experience industrial processes.

Happy Industry also represents a critique of the current climate in the art market and in art production, with the proliferation of art fairs and commercial motives. "Since the mid-1980s, stardom, mystification, and market value have dominated the art market, and artistic qualities and capacities seem to play a smaller and smaller role. The artist has become a media figure who works within a shielded studio, creating works of individual genius that then get sold at high prices through globalised galleries to a privileged group of collectors. With Happy Industry, the artist opens his studio by literally taking it outside of the studio walls, for everyone to see", Joep van Lieshout explains.

Despite his critical attitude, van Lieshout does not hide behind radical opinions. When asked about his own involvement in the art market, he responds: "Of course, Atelier Van Lieshout cannot escape the system, but we try to remain critical and to set our own course of action. This is also why I started AVL-Mundo: by creating an artist-led art space, we reclaim the initiative." 4

ateliervanlieshout.com

An exhibition by Atelier Van Lieshout is on view at the GRIMM gallery in Amsterdam from 10 January to 7 March 2015. grimmgallery.com

Anna Milnar (1/2/3)
DJ Wooldrik (4)