

## **Volkskrant**

**About:** Dutch daily morning newspaper. It was founded in 1919 and it currently has a circulation of approximately 250,000 nationwide.

Visitors don't look at Levi van Veluw's newest work of art – they're in it. V visited the build-up of this total experience in a warehouse in Zaandam and an arts centre in Maastricht.

BY SACHA BRONWASSER

Attention: this is not a dream description. You're in the centre of Maastricht. Cobblestones in the street, narrow sidewalk, the bustle of the shopping streets subsides. You push open the door of Capucijnenstraat 98, a heavy door with two cast iron wolves' heads on it, and enter alone. You disappear into a black hallway. It's dark and on the chilly side. Is it a house? No. A laboratory? No. There are rooms, but that's where the similarity ends. Cabinets hang midway above a trap door. Just in time, you pull your foot back, right in front of an unfathomable black hole. You go upstairs, around the corner. Nothing is familiar, the space is boundless, you dissolve into the dark only to occasionally reappear in a stripe of light. You can make out a sucking funnel shape, you could disappear into it. Through a long corridor – how long is it really? Then a door opens and you stand in a brightly lit stairwell. The clanging noises from the kitchen in arts centre Marres are a welcome relief. You're still here. You're back.

Zaandam, June 29

The sun is bright, but between the tall former ammunition sheds on the Hemkade in Zaandam it is cool and quiet. There's only the occasional screech of a circular saw in the distance. Levi van Veluw emerges from one of the doors; between the imposing buildings he seems even skinnier, with his dark brown cowlick jutting out of his head.

Here, for more than a half year, he has been building his greatest work ever, an installation that will fill all the rooms of arts centre Marres later in October. He rents two warehouses on this terrain on the North Sea: in the one he has his office, the other across the street is where the construction happens. A small team of people, ranging from family members to his regular assistant, have been working quietly and concentratedly, like in a factory where everybody knows their task. In the centre, a complex of corridors and rooms has arisen, 350 square meters in size, which will soon be moved as a whole to Maastricht and fitted like a new lining into the old mansion that houses the art centre.

Series of numbers are stamped on the outer walls: R-4100 is the first corridor; R 300 is filled with liquid. 'I was asked to do a solo exhibition,' says van Veluw as he leads the way through the stage-like corridors. 'Drawings and installations, that's what it was going to be. But I thought: I don't *have* to do it that way. I can do it the way I

want for once. Not make people look at something, but really let them experience something.' To enhance this experience, future visitors better enter alone, or with no more than two at a time.

He steps over slats and sockets through a long narrow corridor, where thousands of geometric shapes are lying in cabinets. 'What I'm actually creating here, I can't really describe all that well. What's important: normally you understand a particular work via the brain, through a thought process. Here it goes through the senses. Therefore everything must be perfect, so that you're not distracted, you're not wondering how something was put together.'

So, those five thousand kilos of wood, hundreds of shelves, tens of thousands of balls, thousands of geometrical shapes, 150 kilos of paint and 100 litres of resin is something you won't be thinking about. A dark structure of boards hangs in the air, like an exploded constructivist drawing, but you can't see any wires. Or rather, you're not looking for them.

The artist steps into a room that is covered from floor to ceiling with cabinets that have floating balls in them. The space is iridescent blue and his voice immediately changes into that of a robot – an unintended acoustic side effect of this total coverage. 'Strange, isn't it, it is as if you're in your own computer,' he says in a Stephen Hawking-like voice. 'Blue is the only colour you come across throughout the entire house. It is the colour of the future.' Oh really? 'Yeah, it has something cool about it, neutral. There are no associations connected with it, unlike red.' He says he always liked to read science fiction from the fifties and sixties. 'Old science fiction is theoretical, but also philosophical. In a story by Isaac Asimov for example mathematics have disappeared and then someone rediscovers mental arithmetic. How does this affect humanity? Entire new worlds are conceived in those books.' This is why he is interested in Scientology – not because he is a follower, but because of the new world order that is, right down to its genesis, entirely made up. 'Personally, I'm very chaotic, which is something I try to exorcise' he says. 'This is all chaos, yet built stone by stone. If you put it down neatly it seems logical again.'

Zaandam, July 23

It's going smoothly, but it *is* warm under the glass skylights of the warehouse. His sister Nina (she can really work very fast) is cutting pieces of wood with iron regularity, every two seconds. Hundreds, thousands, zillions. On the floor, an enormous rectangle is taped out – the size of the truck in which soon everything will have to fit.

In the meantime, a room with dripping blue liquid has been rejected. New: a huge funnel shape made of slats, straight out of an old drawing by van Veluw. The biggest headache now: a ball of resin, with many black shapes floating in it. Resin is nasty stuff, van Veluw can't get it perfect yet. 'If you imagine a new reality, then it has no casting seam.' Two weeks later he e-mails: out with the ball. Weeks and weeks of experimenting, money and resources wasted. 'It felt like a dead thing, lit by artificial light.' When he walks past it he gets a stomach ache, but the decision had to be made.

In Kleef he once saw a very badly done haunted house. 'Then I thought, what if you would do this really well?' To him, that is just as important as the cabinet walls of Louise Nevelson or Gregor Schneider's 'Haus Ur', just to name a few. He would have never talked about these kinds of carnival associations before. 'But now I often don't even wonder about what art is or why, and certainly not how my work relates to other art. Since then I have much more fun,' he says while the wood supplies around him make the average hardware store look like a craft corner.

The rooms are becoming more of a 'total experience'. Inside, it's really dark, the shapes emerge from the darkness, the sense of space is lost. A painter would say: a journey from figurative to abstract – less and less recognizable. With the completion in sight, new questions emerge: temperature, smell, sound, lighting ... lighting! That's the worst. In the room with the blue balls, the light should not come from above, because then it's suddenly a ceiling, see? I nod, but I will only really feel it in my knees and stomach two months later in Maastricht: that the concept of 'above' and 'below' is gone. That, just like in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the room may tilt and rotate and yet still remain the same.

Maastricht, September 27

Stress - well, welcome. At the Marres office Levi Van Veluw welcomes me, pale as a newspaper in his water-blue sweater. Assistant with a burnout, a sick son, someone sends a message: 'Feel a flu coming.' It *will* get finished, but is it good? He grins painfully. 'This is a bad time to ask myself this question. I'm still a purist; right now I think everything's shit. Let me say, 70 per cent is ok.' Again, he wonders aloud what he has actually made. 'I was talking to this woman from the Dutch Dance Festival and she got it right away. That was very special. Even if a dancer like that is dealing with hard-core conceptual dance, there's always the body. The sense of space, the assessing of what you can do, how to move, it's thinking with your body. That's what I'm after. I hope the viewer is too.'

The whole stylish Maastricht house that Marres actually is, with stucco and mouldings and all, has disappeared behind the new areas created by Levi van Veluw. I leave my purse and phone behind. The artist walks me to the door but doesn't join me inside. The door gently falls shut and there I go, into the black corridor. Switch off reason, turn on antennae.

The Relativity of Matter - Levi van Veluw.

Marres, Maastricht, until 29/11. Reservations required.

Quick start

Levi van Veluw (Hoevelaken, 1985) already became known during his studies at ArtEZ in Arnhem with photographs in which he used himself as a base. From coffee to ballpoint drawings, tree bark to complete miniature landscapes, it all appeared on his characteristic bony head. He was soon swallowed up by those with commercial interests. After a number of commissions (e.g. for Land Rover) and being copied profusely, he tried a different approach and created the series *The Origin of the Beginning* and *The Collapse of Cohesion*: drawings, complex dioramas

and films with oppressive fantasy worlds. This spring he was the audience favourite at the Volkskrant Fine Art Prize. *The Relativity of Matter* is his first work that entirely engulfs the viewer.

After thinking, now feeling

Arts Centre Marres in Maastricht presents Levi van Veluw in a longer-term series on the senses in art. Director Valentine Byvanck: 'For ten, fifteen years, the 'discursive' was important in contemporary art: theory, debate. Not that this is wrong, but we also want to explore other things.'