

Speech by Edo Dijksterhuis on the occasion of the opening of *The garbage bag as muze* in Stedelijk Museum Schiedam on 6 February 2020.

Normally we end a speech expressing our gratitude, but it seemed like a good idea to start with a word of thanks this time.

Many many thanks....Donald Trump.

You are the best and the greatest – and you know it. You are the biggest supporter of coalmines and the fossil fuel industry in general. You are the greatest driving force behind environmental destruction and climate change in the world. No one can top you. Thanks to you the environment is at the head of the political agenda nowadays. Thanks to you nobody believes the Anthropocene is a hoax any longer.

And thanks to you Jan Eric Visser now gets the credits he deserves. For this Jan Eric had had to wait for a long time. He was already concerned about sustainability in the eighties, when Greenpeace was still identified with Save the Whale campaigns and the green revolution was the affair of single issue parties. Even people who had read the report of the Club of Rome shrugged their shoulders and went on consuming.

But not Jan Eric. Against all odds as he had decided to be an artist. This means making things and implies: wasting things. After all, with every successful work of art ten failed experiments end up in the bin. Creativity and waste go hand in hand. Quite a dilemma for a hot-tempered young idealist, who would most like to pull drivers out of their idly cars at the traffic lights.

Jan Eric made his first sculptures as a student at the art academy in Kampen. He used the wooden leftovers he found on the floor of the workshop. Thus he found his *modus operandi*: waste matter became his principal medium. Unassumingly, he does not refer to it as *objets trouvés* or *readymades*, but simply calls it waste.

Everything that enters his house - packaging, utensils etc - sooner or later ends up in the blender, disappearing underneath a layer of candle wax in a shredded form. Nothing is discarded. Waste matter only leaves the house again in the form of a work of art. Jan Eric could rightfully be called a trailblazer of the 'zero emission' artistic practice.

However, focusing exclusively on his choice of material and technique I would not do Jan Eric's work justice. I could just as well have talked about insulation boards then, or garden tiles. But Jan Eric's works are intensely charged far beyond that level. And charged is the right and proper word here, because Jan Eric's working method is a form of charging.

He works without a plan or sketch. His shapes originate by working with the material. That is a lengthy process, positively meditative. Sometimes it takes years, in which the material is retaken over and over again until the sculpture reveals itself. To a certain extent the material is leading in this process. If Jan Eric had lived and worked in the countryside of Uganda his raw materials would undoubtedly have been quite different, yielding a different result. The objects portray their maker in that sense: you are what you consume. But they also portray society: you become what you produce.

By covering the waste with candle residue Jan Eric freezes things both literally and metaphorically. They are things from his own past and even his subconscious, but also from his surroundings. In certain periods of time figurative elements appear. Sometimes recognizable: a knot, a bone, a hare reminding us of Barry Flanagan, frames, paws, garlands.

They echo day-to-day life. But of late the sculptures have become more abstract and rounded, reminding us of the work of modernists like Jean Arp and Barbara Hepworth. The skin of the sculptures gives away their content. The waste gives them colour. And still they are difficult to grasp. They appear to be made of marble, wood, leather or stone. The 'zero waste' principle is also consistently applied to the crates in which they are transported. Once unpacked they serve as plinths.

When Jan Eric moved from Gorinchem to Rotterdam this had an effect on his work. It became agile and more assertive. Across time a development from lying sculptures to free standing sculptures may be seen. The sculptor has become more self-assured and his works reflect that. Also size-wise the works become bigger and bigger. Yet, Jan Eric will never make mammoth works. For him no Anish Kapoor-like monumentality or shiny trophy art. His work is and remains of a human scale. It is manageably-sized, tactile and warm.

Putting it in perspective he likes to call his sculpture 'an intermediary form'. It used to be waste. In the future his work perhaps will be opened and the waste will be acknowledged as a valuable resource. Jan Eric's work is an interval in that process, in that change of appreciation. And when this work ends up in museums these institutes may be considered depots for the future in more than one way.

The work of Jan Eric Visser is a circular ideal captured in an altogether characteristic aesthetics. His sculpture is a monument to 21st century creativity. As such it is not about a pseudo-divine creative power or the destructive egomania that has burdened art since the invention of artistic genius. It is about questioning our own significance. About recognizing our responsibility. And about coming up with possible solutions.

But Jan Eric does not preach or play teacher. That's why his work is never titled. Everybody can interpret it himself and take his own view. I should like to propose a subtitle however: Thank you Donald!