

Opening Sunday 21 June
Exhibition until 5 July 2020

Sunday 5 July, at 4pm puppet theatre about LLS by Sietske Van Aerde
Open: Thu – Sun, 2 – 6pm and by appointment

John Körmeling

OPEN WINDOW LLS PALEIS

Could one say that an artist's oeuvre is, to a certain extent, a portrait of the human being he/she is? Without it being a self-portrait in the literal sense of the word, i.e. deliberately created and named as such, the attitude, mentality and some characteristic part of a particular person all become visible in the work. Not only does the artist show the work, the work also shows its maker.

In the case of John Körmeling (Amsterdam, 1951, lives and works in Eindhoven), this has struck me time and again. During the preparation of this project and the many accompanying conversations I had with Körmeling, writing a text about his work seemed increasingly difficult. As it all follows naturally from who he is. No theories or symbolic references, no hierarchy or exclusivity. Just some good ideas, carried out in a practical and level-headed manner, with humour and the ability to put things into perspective, *and* for everyone! Yet without losing any profundity: it often involves ingenious solutions to seemingly very complex problems, which Körmeling is able to identify in a perfectly lucid way. He shows how things could be done differently, whereas we often no longer see what is staring us in the face.

This is the heart of his oeuvre, which operates on the boundary between visual art, architecture and urban planning.

Think, for example, of his works in the collections of the Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven), the Centraal Museum (Utrecht), the Muhka and Middelheim (Antwerp), or of the multicoloured chandelier at Schiphol Airport, the Piushaven Bridge and the rotating house on a roundabout in Tilburg: whether only a couple of people or tens of thousands of them pass by is irrelevant to Körmeling. "What I think is important is how you deal with space. That's what I show in my work. That's why my works in public space are 'exhibitions' too. People can see and visit them."

What also strikes me is that John Körmeling wears his own material and work: a blue and red shirt made of a Happy Street-themed fabric (his pavilion at the world exhibition in Shanghai in 2010), or the ORIGINAL COPY socks he designed for Bata Industrials. He prefers fluorescent colours. You often see him in his orange workman's trousers, yellow fleece or reflective-band jacket. In his safety clothing, one could easily mistake Körmeling for a (dock)worker. Which is what actually happened: when he visited Antwerp several times in the second half of March and April (i.e. during the coronavirus lockdown) to draw the work 'nog een universele mens' ['another universal human being'] on the window of LLS Paleis, he was one of the only ones who did not have to identify himself at the border or account for his journey. "What a terrific time for me! I'm finally taken seriously!"

John Körmeling describes his work as "extroverted". Not unlike himself, his work is focused on the world around him. Körmeling's public interventions aren't meteors landing in some random place, with no one understanding their relevance. Rarely do we notice such sensibility to the surroundings and the social context, and such attention to the sculpture's impact on the neighbourhood or its placement in the landscape.

Körmeling is best known for his lively and multicoloured Happy Street pavilion, a huge and wide kind of open figure-of-eight-shaped street, in which everything and everyone is connected and flows naturally, expressing and applauding movement and change. Other interventions are a lot less explicit, e.g. the 2019 'pavilion for birdwatchers' on Texel. This look-out was designed in such

a way that it appears to float above the dunes. Its linear form, however, follows the line of dunes, so that its integration into the landscape is nearly complete. While one pavilion could hardly be more eye-catching, the other merges into the surroundings, as it were.

The aptest adjective for John Körmeling's oeuvre might be "open": his interventions often widen the field of vision and increase accessibility and ease of use.

OPEN WINDOW LLS PALEIS removes the boundary between inside and outside. The visitors are invited to widen their gaze and regard the street, the traffic and the neighbours as an exhibition too. In addition to the gaze, the other senses will be involved in the experience as well, rendering it more active and complete. "I like reversing the direction of view. I'm opening the whole thing up... And the rotating window is useful, which is equally important in my work", according to the practical Körmeling.

S.L., June 2020

Translated by Sis Matthé

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