

IN SERVICE TO... THE OPERATIONAL REALM OF WILLEM CLAASSEN'S APPLIED UNTENSILS

by Freek Lomme

*We live our lives “economically”:
trying to effectively level up
earning money and spending com-
fort. “Economic” is an everyday
word symptomatic of an “economist”
current. This current carries the
optimisation of time – and costs –
effectiveness, basically constrain-
ing conditions to practice life.*

*Whilst living, we take
things as they come. Most things
are functional. As we touch upon
these, we live up to their reality:
a reality dictated by our func-
tional environment. As we are
conditioned to use things for
their effective function, rather
than their operational meaning, we
relate to the economic effect of
the objects we're faced with. In
this economy, we take objects and
settings as vehicles, as mediums
to draw us also into usability. We
want to level up ourselves effec-
tively and gain a focus for such
usability: our mode of living.*

For a long time, installation art has been considered an artificial space that creates a sphere that completely captures our minds and bodies within the realm of the artwork's narrative. Until the '80s this type of art was perceived as a sensory phenomenological realm. Following this however installation has been increasingly perceived as a site- and time-specific spatial intervention – offering “atmospheres” that capture all senses. Mind and body both add up to the artwork, as they perceive the artwork.

Can these values of installation art be sustained in the

present cultural sphere of operational economics, triggered by functionalisation? Site- and time-specifics seem to release an intellectual sphere of authorship, as they position the artist as director, as performer and critic: a rather closed, intellectually absent presence without any evident operational function. Sensory, phenomenological functions are triggered by mere release of colour, sound and form don't seem to imbue a present, function-driven relation...This offers a call to the audience which is rather design-savvy and trend-watching oriented.

Willem Claassen makes operational settings. We encounter these first of all as active environments as they function and thus offer us a sphere of functionality to relate with. This very sphere might also be the reason for the successfulness of Design and the reason why Willem Claassen's work touches upon the realm of design. His work does function and adheres to our



Inside Villa Volta, de Efteling

real, economic world. This might very well be the reason why static, passive art objects are “not in service”/why meaning might only be activated if it's actively operational. This might also be the reason why amusement park attractions are competitive with arts: they are more effective as they evidently function...

Take, for instance the attraction Villa Volta, at the amusement park De Efteling. On the outside, it is a Victorian house, on the inside it narrates a story inspired on the 18th century story of a gang of robbers, De Bokkerijders. Once inside, the visitor is taken along further into the space by a radio play, eventually ending up on a chair, locking a belt, and the room starts to spin around, suggesting the visitor spins around.

In a way, Willem creates similar scenery. His installations operate “in your face”. Contrary to this amusement park attraction, his work does not become an overwhelming experience, as it does not entail mere function. But second to this face value, Willem demands his audience to take on the operational beyond the function.

What is more, the fact that Willem realises his works in art spaces and not in amusement parks supplies another effect. While people in amusement parks go there to primarily for the functional experience of enjoyment, the audience and sphere of the exhibition demands that the viewers reflect upon their relation to the operational experiences offered. As such, Willem plays upon the

thin line that balances “economic” tools and a participatory economics.

The audience of his applied utensils have to reconsider the actual operative result: recoiling our trigger into the functional, responding by levelling up our habitual mode of living. As such, the operational, surreal scenery of Willem Claassen is both a functional and a trivial environment. It takes the ready-made environment, with all its function and optional targets, into a call for the meaning of our increasingly optimised environment. Claassen’s work does so by breaking the chain of our economically motivated habits, drawing upon the functional consequences of our designed culture, and reclaims a domain of artistic doubt. In service to...

Thanks to Anja Novak for I drew inspiration from her text The place of the installation, published in Onomatopee 11, Private Territory.



WOENSDAG MIDDAG MET JAK #1

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together with Jak peters / 2010