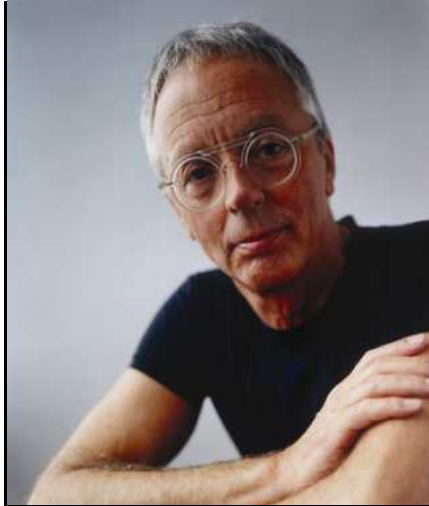


Gijs Bakker On His Wife, His Son and the Future of Dutch Design



Surrounded by pieces of his and Emmy van Leersum's jewellery designs, Gijs Bakker talks about his current exhibition, his feelings about Droog and the new design energy he senses will soon overtake the industry.



By Gabrielle Kennedy /asdf 28-09-2009

In a presentation he gave yesterday to coincide with an exhibition of his and Emmy van Leersum's jewellery design, Gijs Bakker broadened his subject to include his stance on the future of Dutch design.

Bakker was married to Van Leersum, who tragically died of cancer in 1984. In an emotional introduction to her work and design process, he talked about the pangs and memories he felt when touching and arranging some of her pieces for the first time in twenty five years.

“When I was laying things out, I could hear her voice saying No! Put that piece here not there,” he said. “She was a liberated woman, *avant le lettre*. I still remember interviews we gave in '67. The journalists would ask about her neck pieces and then put the microphone under my nose not hers. Back then it was inconceivable for them to think that a woman might have any ideas on this subject.”

Van Leersum disliked mathematics, but was passionate about dimensions, which in her pieces are never arbitrary and always either have meaning or relate to function. "And if you work like that," Bakker said, "it is easy to drift away from what jewellery should be, namely, an object that has a spiritual or physical relation to the human body."

In the 60s, Van Leersum's work was considered revolutionary. Her pieces both converted to the shape of the body while maintaining their own significant forms. They were philosophical, geometric and possessed a type of kinetic dynamism that left critics inspired.

Next, the exhibition will travel to the [Zuiderzeemuseum](#) where it will be extended to include product design by Bakker and Van Leersum's son, Aldo. "It's a bit like an Italian mafia family," laughed Bakker.

When questioned about recent shifts in the design world, Bakker was deliberately cautious but clearly well informed on the zeitgeist. "I don't want to go into details about Droog," he said, "but I feel that what it has done, is make design more familiar, more recognizable, more playful, less luxurious, more normal ... and we did that with great success. But that was a period and now I feel that that period is over. We have already moved on to the next thing.

"And I can only say what I notice, and what I see with students at the academy with regards to what is happening next," Bakker continued. "I sense an urge for slowness, for more attention, and for design that is dictated by an awareness of everybody's needs. We can't just keep producing thousands of objects. It's overloaded. We don't need so much anymore. These are the ideas that seem to be playing a role in the minds of the younger generation."

As an example Bakker points out [Aldo's](#) work. "He was always against Droog," he laughs. "He told me it was good for me, kept me busy and off the streets, but that it wasn't what he wanted. Now I understand what he meant by that. He is creating things more carefully."

Aldo Bakker's ceramic table series was presented in Milan this year. The water carafe, in particular, has a lyrical narrative that relates to how we handle a carafe and how it relates to one's body.

"I think this sort of approach is the next step," repeats Bakker.

In his conclusion, Bakker made a reference to Martin Visser, a Dutch furniture designer who told his students back in the early 70s to be careful with their ideas. "When I heard that, I thought it was crazy," he said. "I thought you should be wild with your ideas, but lately I have come to understand what he meant. He means how important it is to properly explore ideas, to go deeper into them instead of just throwing them out. It's taken a while for me to really get that."

Images: Gijs Bakker, Emmy van Leersum, and two of the exhibited pieces - top by Van Leersum and bottom - I Don't Wear Jewels, I Drive Them - by Bakker.