

## Krijn de Koning



Above: Tim Groen, **Krijn de Koning**. New York, 2010.

**One could be perfectly content leaving the first impression of Krijn de Koning's site-specific installations for what it is; bright, happy, minimalist. But like with most good work, it's what you think about it after reflecting on it for a bit that makes it really interesting. While his work is super-happy, it is also oblique, complex, formal, surreal...**

Krijn once half-jokingly labeled his work "neo-modernist baroque architecture," and when you see his labyrinthine structures "growing" over, say, an existing nineteenth century stairwell, or plopped on the ruins of a medieval abbey, you totally see what he means.

I spoke with Krijn when installing his first New York solo show, *In Here, For This*. For the exhibit, at Demisch Danant Gallery, he created five pieces of ambiguous 'furniture.' While the shapes of these deceptively haphazard pieces are more or less small versions of his environments, the small scale makes you relate the pieces to actual furniture, without being able to actually identify their functions. A bookcase/desk/table? Or a chair/pedestal/divider?

At the opening of his show, people started interacting with the pieces; leaning, sitting, placing a drink on it (and quickly changing their mind about that one).

I asked Krijn whether he was worried about dings or scratches. "Not at all", he said, "If you have to, you just get it refinished after a while."

**TG: I like your work for many reasons, but one of them is that it strikes me the same way great graphic design strikes me. Does that make sense to you?**

KdK: I never thought about the graphic design angle, but I get it. It probably has to do with all the clean lines. And my use of color and shape is probably very graphic as well; I'm basically directing the viewer's attention to something by adding manipulative layers.

**TG: Another thing you have in common with graphic design is that your work always needs a context.**

KdK: That's true. It's about organizing physical reality, in order to expose beauty, or even just to change, or emphasize something that would have been unclear without your action. Take the reality of a room; when you paint that room completely red, you can't deny that you experience the space differently than if it were all white.

And therein lies the difference between applied design and art; design is supposed to serve a function, whereas with art it's a little more blurry.

**TG: Unless the conceptual intention of a piece of design is to be ignored or misunderstood...**

KdK: Hmm...then I'd argue that design has become art.

**TG: Here we are talking about graphic design, and critics always like to bring up architecture and interior or product design when discussing your work. Is comparing your work to various applied design principles even a relevant discussion to you?**

KdK: Yes. There's so much to say about art versus design, because there's a history attached to the subject that goes back to the turn of the last century, or arguably even further.

To me, the difference between these principles lies in the intention.

Here's an example; I was part of *SuperStories* (The 2nd Triennial of art, fashion and design in Hasselt, Belgium, TG.) where it was oddly obvious that design is playing with tools which were really owned by artists in the 60's and 70's. Tools which have to do with creating values by controlling what the viewer pays attention to. Placing a chair in the middle of a room on a pedestal, or declaring something a "limited edition," for example. The funny thing was that I participated as an artist, but my installation in the lobby was actually used as seating! So the differences between my intention and the product designers' intentions, created a total reversal.

And another significant difference between art and design is that in order for design to be effective, it

needs to be intelligent, and somehow beautiful. Art is judged differently; a deeply personal angle is considered a quality in art, a must even.

**TG: I read this great quote from you in which you state that its okay for art to be a failure. Can you explain that a little?**

KdK: There is really desperate and painful great art, and art that is basically a mistake. And you can look at it and think 'I don't like it,' but that doesn't automatically make you doubt the artist's professionalism. Even though you don't like it, you still acknowledge that it is art. Whereas failed design is just failed design. Unfortunately this almost implies that almost anyone can declare themselves an artist and get away with whatever, which is why—thankfully—there are criteria decent art needs to meet. Again, it's about intention. Why do you do it? What is it about? Who are you? What is this world? Very complicated questions; you can't answer them just like that. But you have to deal with difficult questions; art means little without consciousness.

**TG: Now you totally set yourself up for this question, of course: Why do you make art?**

KdK: I do it to try to somehow understand this world. Making art is my desperate attempt to engage in a dialogue with reality, and to pry a finger behind the wonder and miracle of all things.

(Pause) It's impossible, but that doesn't mean I'm not trying!

Right after our interview Krijn had to run back to the gallery to finish up, since the opening took place be the next evening. He had already picked the beautiful, deep bottle-greens and grey-blues which were pretty close to what he used in his sketch. (Full disclosure: I designed the graphic identity for "In Here, For This", based on Krijn's own drawing).

## In Here, For This. Krijn de Koning.



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He told me that he frequently waits until the very last minute to pick the colors he'll use, which makes sense because the site of each installation is completely different.

### LINKS:

>To get a good sense of Krijn de Koning's work, check out his own site [krijndekoning.com](http://krijndekoning.com)

>There's an [excellent book](#) (ISBN-10: 908690016X, ISBN-13: 978-9086900169), which was published by Veenman Publishers in 2008 after Krijn won the 2007 Sikkens Award ([>check out my post on the Sikkens Award here<](#)). Get it!

>Krijn's New York Gallery: [Demisch Danant](#).

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