



It would be natural for an artist like Krijn de Koning, now 20 years into a respectable career, to have a retrospective exhibition at one of The Netherlands more respectable museums. This is not the case, for the same reason the Amsterdam artist has remained relatively unknown to the general public despite his international acclaim: his work is mostly temporary.

That is why it's particularly nice that the international art world hasn't failed to take note of his contributions. This week, De Koning was awarded the prestigious Sikkens Prize, a national award honouring artists, architects and others who use colour in a ground-breaking way. The first Sikkens Prize was awarded to Gerrit Rietveld in 1959 and in the years since many illustrious laureates have followed, among them architect and designer Le Corbusier, film director Ettore Scola and visual artists such as Peter Struycken, Jean Gorin and Donald Judd.

De Koning builds large, puzzling structures that are best described as interior interventions, or architectural shapes that penetrate existing walls, inhabit stairwells and cover floors.

Using simple materials—plaster, wood and paint—he creates large planes of bright, sharply contrasting colour. De Koning has made work inside interiors of every type and period, all over the world, from Roman buildings and baroque churches to farm houses and modern museum halls.

'My work basically deals with space and place,' says De Koning. 'It is about the function of a space, about what is visible there and whether or not it has beauty. Colour is a very important factor. Some of my works are based on colour alone. It's as important as matter or structure.'

It's a pity that most of the impressive installations have to be removed once their exhibition time is over. They aren't built to last, so what remains are photographs, models and drawings. Because of their illusory nature, the works sometimes escape the attention of the public, but they haven't gone unrecognized by the Dutch art world.

'Using colour and form, as well as feeling and atmosphere, he evokes a sensual experience of space that raises in a unique way the issue of interaction between the public and the built environment,' the Sikkensprijs Foundation, which has presented the prize since 1959, wrote in a press release announcing De Koning's award.

'It's a great honour,' says De Koning, who received the award in Rotterdam on 1 December. 'I was impressed, because I always knew it was a very prestigious prize. I'm very glad this professional jury appreciates my work.'

Although the prize doesn't include a financial reward, the Sikkens Foundation has already supported some of De Koning's projects, including a current large installation at the Rotterdam Centrum voor Beeldende Kunst. The green structure, which starts outside the building and moves into the gallery itself, will remain there for three years. Meanwhile, Amsterdam gallery Slewe on Kerkstraat exhibits two large De Koning sculptures until 22 December.

Sjarel Ex, director of the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam and member of the Sikkens Prize jury has followed the artist's career from his first exhibition at the Rietveld Academy in the late 1980s. 'His work always stood out,'

says Ex. 'He creates architecture inside existing architecture, in such a way that the visitor experiences a space as new. His use of colour leaves an impression that is physical.'

In his previous position as director of the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, Ex invited De Koning to create a permanent installation, which was finished in 1999. The multi-colour work is an agglomeration of small rooms that connect over two stories in one wing of the museum, which is a part of the former mental institution called the Willem Arntszhuis.

'This work directly refers to the history of the place as one of the first insane asylums of the Netherlands,' explains Ex. 'De Koning added extra walls to make a crisscross of spaces. With this complexity of architecture and colour he created something that suggests complete craziness. It's one of the most intricate works within his oeuvre.'

But De Koning's installations aren't all as chaotic as this one. He usually analyzes a space and adds only visual elements that he thinks are logical to its original construction. He has also created very minimal, serene art in churches, such as for the Abbaye de Corbigny in France.

'I'm trying to get a grip on reality,' the artist says. 'I need a clear view on what is

COMPLEX INTERIORS

Whether it's in an insane asylum or a church, Krijn de Koning's art always manages to blend in.

BY MARINUS DE RUITER

*Blue and yellow: Abbaye de Corbigny.
Red: Now on display at gallery Slewe.*

there, on what things basically are. If you occupy yourself with this way of thinking you realise that it is essentially a question. You'll never get a real answer to it. What is the function of this fantastic, strange and sometimes awful reality that surrounds us?'

In many cases one is able to enter the installations of De Koning. From inside, they offer a unique perspective on the surrounding environment. His current work at Slewe gallery, for example, a red and green wooden structure with four benches, from which the visitor's view is guided outwards, through the windows and doorways of the gallery. 'Works like these are like observatories,' says De Koning. 'They can direct your attention to specific areas.'

Since 2003 he's also been busy with a large urban development project in the Zuidas of Amsterdam, which will be completed around 2010.

De Koning's idea is to upgrade the terrain occupied by the buildings of energy company NUON, one of the least attractive structures in the business park behind the Amsterdam RAI. British architect Sir Norman Foster created a respectable tower next to the park, which is about 107 meters by 83 meters. Foster deliberately posted fences around his building to visually seal it off from the NUON offices.

De Koning's project aims to link these unsightly NUON buildings to the surrounding architectural prestige objects next to it, by adding all kinds of visual elements. For example, the entire area will be covered with black pavement stones and the facades of the buildings will be covered with coloured glass planes.

Even though De Koning's approach is visually arresting and instantly recognizable, it's also humble, in a way, because it is always related to what is going on in its surroundings.

And fortunately, the NUON project will be built to last. **W**