



2018 Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for Art, awarded to Erik van Lieshout

Presentation speech by Carla Sieburgh, member of the jury of the 2018 Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for Art

Ladies en gentlemen, you heard it in the video: this laudatio will be about Erik van Lieshout. He himself would say: 'Of course. It's always about me.'

In one of his films, called *Die Insel*, he starts off saying: 'Without me, there would be no film. So what? Will I be punished because it is about me? By whom? The art police?'

No, Van Lieshout will not be punished today. Quite the opposite: he will receive a prize. The biggest visual arts prize in the Netherlands. The biggest: that suits him.

Van Lieshout's work, ladies and gentlemen, is unrestrained, boundless, explosive, radical, confronting, disarming, and deeply personal.

His films pass by as thundering freight trains, their speed will suck you in. They are chock full of images: Charcoal drawings, text fragments, newspaper clippings, collages, interviews, animations, props.

That sounds exhausting, and it is. But most of all it is exciting, intense and disruptive.

Van Lieshout is the classic fool, who pulls his pranks on anyone. But as befits a proper fool, his underlying messages are serious.

What other artist can cohabitate with goats for months in India, and turn that into a documentary that addresses profound questions on colonial history, censorship and religion?

Van Lieshout will not let himself be bound. Anything that is not allowed, he will surely do it. He will not shy away from precarious circumstances. On the contrary. He moves right in and starts a conversation.

Four years ago, at Manifesta, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, he filmed in the basement of the Hermitage, in Russia. It was a documentary about the famous cats that keep the mice in check. But the film also touched on Pussy Riot, the feminist rock group, gay rights and censorship under Putin. And it asked whether art is able to change systems or improve people's lives.

That is a lot, but Van Lieshout is a generous person. He offers us his art, just like when he went door to door in a poor neighbourhood in Rotterdam and started asking people: 'Hi, I am an artist. Do you need art? I can give you art.'

The jury, ladies and gentlemen, greatly appreciates Van Lieshout's work. It takes a lot to say sensible things about the world, be deeply engaged and, at the same time, create powerful works of art.

For Van Lieshout this is his mission, his duty even, maybe: The more polarised the world becomes, the more an artist has to speak out. And speak out he does, seemingly without much effort.

His hyperboles, however, transcend obnoxious opinions. They find raw nerves in the skin of our day and age. And in his typical, tragicomic way, the artist then pricks some more to see where it will hurt the most.

That pursuit deserves our support.

So please join us, ladies and gentlemen, in a round of applause for Erik van Lieshout, winner of the Heineken Prize for Art 2018.