

RIK LINA: CONVERSATION WITH LAURENS VANCREVEL



AMSTERDAM 2011 - Rik Lina & Laurens Vancrevel

***Rik, let's begin at the beginning. You wrote somewhere that from early childhood you were constantly occupied by watching, and that the choice for drawing and painting originated spontaneously.*

Indeed, I've been doing it for as long as I can remember, mostly in a comic strip style, which has fascinated me from an early age; for instance, SF-hero Flash Gordon didn't appear in our newspaper, but I used to read the comic everyday on my way to school in a Rotterdam, as it was displayed in a shop-window at the time. At the same time I used my pocket money to buy the *Eric the Norman* albums by H.C.Kresse whose splendid black-and-white brush continues to capture me.

Op zondag 14 oktober is een verzameling (in een bus) die vol
om ons ook wordt zandig) ook om een roboten wagen te stellen, ook de
we hebben overnacht in Afyon (opish) & stond mijn gewonde in het hotel

ALL NIGHT UNTRAVELLED ON
TO GET STAGED IN AFYON

2



hierbij geïllustreerd
den hant. z. kersse (sind de woorn)
enige mogelijkheden
van mijn pet

Self-portraits in a letter from Istanbul 1964

***We've never actually talked about it, but it is a real coincidence that both of us come from South Limburg and that we were even born there within less than one year. In those days South Limburg was still an absolutely exotic part of the country, with a completely different landscape, with a distinctive language and accent, a totally different attitude in life – in almost everything an antipode to sensible (down-to-earth?) Holland.*

Sure, Limburgers we are ... and definitely not Hollanders; that is what I like to say, though it's not completely true. Indeed, I was born in Valkenburg-Houten-St. Gerlach, October 1942, but it happened in a former hotel, which was used as an emergency hospital. Due to the war (WW 2) there were no beds available in the regular hospital at Maastricht, where my parents were living at the time.

My father Herm Lina came from Venlo, my mother Lucky Nieve from the *Jordaan* district in Amsterdam. Till I was five, we lived in Maastricht, then we moved to The Hague and when I was ten to Rotterdam where we lived till I was fifteen. And finally to Amsterdam. So, I grew up in the *Randstad* with all its pros and cons. During my entire youth I've had to fight – often literally – in order to conquer a place in the new neighborhood and at the various schools. So I've been uprooted early on, and I feel fine with it.

A special aspect of my youth in Holland was sailing, which I loved. I soon joined the sea scouts and so I sailed every Dutch lake, canal and river. At the same time I experienced the rather harsh discipline of this pre-training for the army and the marine. I acquired every badge and decoration there was and I became the youngest boatswain in The Netherlands. So, after being checked for military service, I was immediately selected for the officers' training. I didn't care, because I'd already got a deferment in order to complete my studies at the Art Academy. At re-inspection I evidently got the S-5 code (= mentally unstable). By then I had already been hitchhiking around the Mediterranean with my wife Elizé.



Sea-scout Rik 1955



Elizé Bleys & Rik Lina in Lybia 1965



Sulawesi-Indonesia 2000

***Have you ever gone back to Limburg later on?*

In my youth I often spent holidays in Limburg, Venlo and Maastricht, with relatives and friend of my parents' and I've got some fine memories of the woods, the hills, the brooks with leeches and the marl caves with passages even stretching into Belgium. But then I also used to sail for years and also snorkel in the lakes of Holland and in the North Sea near Katwijk, where I even saw schools of fish ... unimaginable now.

In 1999 I had an exhibition in Maastricht, invited the press and relatives: one cousin showed up ...

Years of travel have only enforced my detachment, the culture shocks of the Arabic and Caribbean worlds ... So, I don't feel a Limburger or a Hollander, not even a Dutchman or a European anymore. But I'm still strongly attached to the city of Amsterdam.

***Do you remember how other people reacted to your first drawings, before you had become an artist'?*

I have a vivid childhood memory of how I succeeded in exciting the employees of the Pander firm next door to my father's shop in The Hague, with some very cruel and erotic drawings of tortured saints, Indians or crusaders and the like, which I made on the spot.

***Still, there must have been some decisive moment, or a person who opened your eyes for the art of drawing.*

From elementary school in The Hague some pastel drawings on notebook covers remain, which were given to my mother by the brother who taught drawing. He must have given me the crayons because they definitely weren't part of normal school equipment.



Pastel-crayons 1950

***What were the first things that caught your eye to make you actually watch properly?*

In my father's shop in The Hague the price labels were written by hand in calligraphy by a man who came over to do this special work, which I used to follow with concentration. Also his large Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck-like objects for the shop window attracted my special attention as a child.

***What was your parents' attitude towards art and artistic calling?*

I have never noticed any stimulus from my parents or family. They were 'modern' though, they would be called 'yuppies' nowadays. Upper middle class, very bourgeois and very Catholic ... but art wasn't given any more attention than the usual in that environment.

Still, I had a happy youth and I only started to feel 'strange' and 'different' in puberty. For instance, I remember that our house in Rotterdam, where we lived from when I was 10 to 15 years of age, was a very modern steel-and-glass flat, a kind of Bauhaus building. My mother had a loud yellow plastic handbag with a Chagall print (which I only realized years later). My father's bookcase contained Hemingway and Steinbeck.

At secondary school in Amsterdam, Dalton method, a number of my fellow

students were also focused on creative topics. We even started an extracurricular workshop with a band, a theatre group, exhibitions, publishing our own poetry in the school magazine, etc.

My father encouraged me to go on writing when I was engaged in the school paper, also because he had been occupied with journalism for a while in his youth. But when I announced at home that I was no longer interested in regular secondary education (HBS) and that I wanted to enroll in art school, it turned out that he had already booked a place for me at the management school of Nijenrode. He intended me to follow in his footsteps, he was the manager of a gentlemen's fashion company. When I refused emphatically and as a compromise proposed to have a look in Breda (having in mind the Catholic Academy St. Joost, attended by some friends of mine), he agreed on condition that I applied for a job at *De Stem*, a newspaper edited by a friend of his. I actually did, but barefoot and dressed in a sheep-skin...

The reason why I wanted to go to an art academy, was that drawing came easily to me and also because then I wanted to draw in nature, often on my own, and enjoyed that very much. That was already a real choice. Although at the time I was also writing poetry and plays, and making music, mainly jazz. I made the choice for the visual arts, sold my drum-set in order to buy paint.

The disagreement with my father escalated so much so I left home prematurely. It was 1961. Art academy wasn't negotiable at home, so I moved in with my girlfriend Elizé Bleys in the Palestrina Street. We had already known each other for a year. We hitchhiked to Spain every summer. Elizé descends from an artistic family: her father was an architect, her grandfather was a painter and her great-grandfather was the well-known architect Bleys of the Saint Nicolas Church in Amsterdam. We married in 1962. Elizé's influence has been enormously important to my complete development, and still is, more important than any creative influence. Not only do we share a lot of interests, but surely also our way and style of life. She has always supported my often considerably aberrant ideas without compromise. To give an example: four times I was offered a teaching place at an academy and each time she agreed with my refusal. Rather poverty than dependence. Which artist's wife is capable to do such thing?

An uncle, a brother of my late mother, who was in house-renovation, felt sorry for us and provided a house, which was almost 'unfit for habitation'. And so I got my first studio in the Vrolijk Street. I got an interest-free advance from the government to study at the IVKNO (the Amsterdam Institute of Arts and Crafts, later re-baptized as *Gerrit Rietveld Academie*), because my father didn't give me a dime. Elizé had a job and I earned an extra now and then with dirty and dangerous, but well-paid factory and cleaning jobs. There I worked together with the first generation of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants.

I made a very conscious choice for the IVKNO - it was a sort of Bauhaus academy. My friends attended St. Joost Academy in Breda or the National Academy (Rijksakademie) in Amsterdam; I disliked those schools with their hopelessly old-fashioned academism.



AMSTERDAM 1964
Elizé Bleys- Rik Lina- Fred Stakelbeek- Ben Peters



Theo van Baaren 1962



Rik lina - Spain 1962

***During your years at the IVKNO/Rietveld Academy it wasn't obvious that Max Ernst, Wifredo Lam or Roberto Matta to become your main sources of inspiration. Young artists at that time were mostly attracted by Pop Art and Fluxus but not by those surrealists. How did you come into contact with these uncommon sources of inspiration?*

I have already mentioned the world of comic strips as an important source of inspiration, which it remained for a long time. Actually, it was more important for me than art. Only iconography interested me at first, because it is familiar to comics. But also the ethnographic collections of the Folklore Museum in Rotterdam and the Museum of the Tropics in Amsterdam used to stimulate my imagination much more than the visual arts museums, and in fact they still do. Theo van Baaren's tremendous book on ethnography, *Bezielend Beelden (Inspired Depicting)*, which I read at that time, is still kept in my studio. One of my friends in secondary school painted in Dali's style - I thought it was utterly horrible. Pop Art or Fluxus only interested me as a funny phenomena. But prehistoric art did fascinate me, I guess because of its material aspect, which I also recognized in the paint-masses of CoBra artists and American action-painters. I also liked Dubuffet and the Spanish painters, Saura, Tapiés. The smell of fresh oil paint in the Stedelijk Museum ... something I remember vividly. Nothing like it has ever returned there! The motional manner of painting attracted me, the wild style of Pollock, Franz Kline, Mark Tobey, Dotremont or Karel Appel. I only arrived at surrealism when I understood that this way of working was related to automatism - that they had learned it from the surrealists.

Automatism was already familiar to me at the time, but from a completely different corner: through the Beat Poets I got into contact with Zen Buddhism, whose masters propagate an intuitive consciousness which was put into practice by the Zen painters of China and Japan. Do you remember that our first contact was made through an article I had written about Zen? The calligraphic way of representing reality, in which seeing and feeling, writing and thinking blend into a unique painted reality, was what I tried to make my own.



AMSTERDAM 1963 - Jan Holleman-Ben Peters-Rik Lina



Exhibition poster - Rik Lina and Fred Stakelbeek - 1962

In my first real exhibition I showed that kind of work. It was held in the students' cinema *Kriterion* together with Fred Stakelbeek and, as the poster shows, at the turn of the year 1962-63. Freddy was my comrade then, we often painted together, roamed through town, Phono-bar, Stedelijk, night concerts, hashish, we travelled to Turkey together, and so on. I was at the academy then, he was studying cultural anthropology and he remained an autodidact on purpose. Freddy had made friends with the Amstelveen informal painter Theo Bennes, who was also interested in Zen. We visited his studio (also Tajiri's and his wife Ferdi's, for that matter) but Bennes' way of applying automatism didn't really appeal to me, it was too passive for me, he just let the paint flow together, everything remained only coincidental, whereas I thought something should really happen with it, like handwriting or other rigorous additions.

What I also liked was Odilon Redon, those colors! And his black-and-white lithographs! But Max Ernst came much later, when I - through you - had finally got completely into surrealism.

***Wasn't that a bit earlier? You were already talking about Ernst when we first met.*

You're right, I was already acquainted with him before, but I didn't consider him as a surrealist, but as a fascinating painter, also his writings that I translated for Moksha. Our first contact took place indeed as a result of an article of mine about Zen that you criticized in a contribution of yours. I think that as a reply I quoted André Breton and that afterwards we met for the first time.

***The first big Max Ernst exhibition in Het Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam took place not earlier than 1970. You must have seen it.*

Yes, of course. When I saw it, I realized that oil paint technique was worthwhile after all. I hadn't been practicing it serious, I preferred techniques on paper and graphics, the alchemy of lithography. But Max Ernst's total freedom in thought and technique struck me like lightning. Ernst himself was present at the opening, but I didn't dare approach him, though I did pinch a beautiful photo from the press table ... the picture in which he shimmers through the wall - by Frederick Sommer - it's still hanging in my studio.



Foto Max Ernst by Frederic Sommer

***Didn't any inspiration issue from the teaching staff?*

At the IVKNO I did not experience any influence from anyone, nor from fellow- students. Mostly I didn't attend the classes on art history. I was already familiar with graphic artist Ab Sok's pure black-and-white through *Eric de Noorman* and the Zen painters. Jan Elburg, who instructed 'application of materials', was more like a friend to me, we had common interests. I was occupied with things that school didn't offer and I only stayed there to pick up techniques, like lithography in an extra year with master-printer David Schmidt. I hoped in vain to be able to earn a living by printing graphics for other people, because I knew already for sure that art wouldn't pay a living.

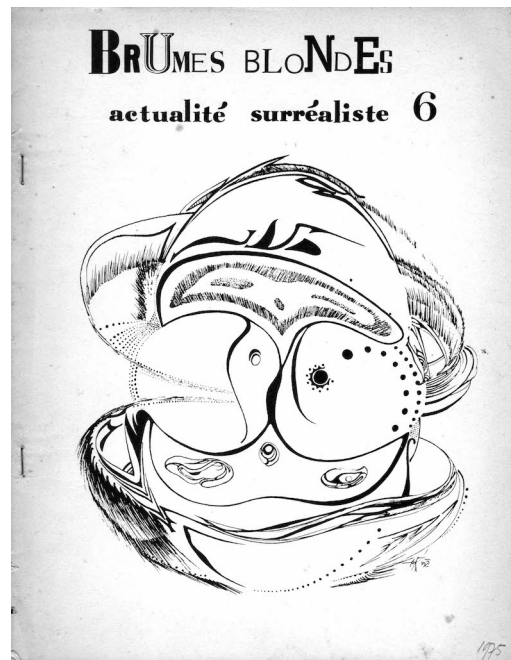
***You contributed in defining the image of 'Moksha'. How did you get into the circle around Hans Geluk?*

Hans Geluk worked at the students' cinema Kriterion, like Hans Plomp for that matter. Hans Geluk lived just round the corner. How I first met him, I don't remember, but it might have been during my exhibition in Kriterion with Fred Stakelbeek. Geluk and Plomp were the center of a group of students. They made Moksha on university printing apparatus, first on a stencil machine, later on an enormous Xerox machine, as large as a room. Moksha, psychedelic bulletin, appeared between 1968 and 1971. Fourteen editions were published. When I came upon the first issues of Moksha, I immediately offered Hans Geluk to make illustrations for the magazine. The first ones were even drawn on real stencil-sheets!

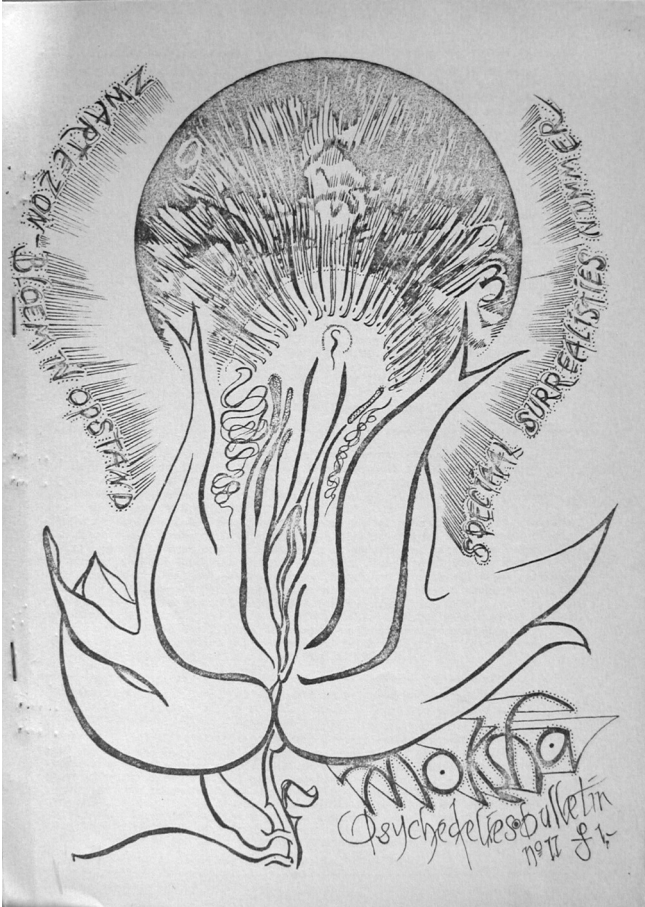
Hans Geluk studied psychology and had contacts with scientists who did research into psychedelic drugs and who he gave a forum in Moksha. He also organized conferences and informatory meetings about psychedelics, even for the police! One of my drawings was published in the police magazine, unfortunately without the real marijuana leaf that I had pasted on for Moksha. Only a small circle of people in Amsterdam were doing drugs in those days. Everybody knew everybody. Interest in it coincided with the rising underground youth culture, with the alternative scene, with Provo, the magazine Hitweek-Aloha, with Fantasio and Paradiso, with communes, and so on.



MOKSHA 1968 - William Blake poem



PEOTL - drawing 1975



Cover Moksha 11 - also catalog for the international surrealist exhibition "Black Sun - Flower in Revolt" 1969

***Thanks to your friendship with Hans Geluk a special issue of Moksha was dedicated to the international exhibition of surrealism in Scheveningen in 1969.*

Yes, Moshka number 11 was the catalogue of that beautiful exhibition at the Kurhaus, *Black Sun - Flower in Revolt*. Funny that the next issues were suddenly published in posh printing by The Hague editor Bert Bakker.

***In those days you also made wall paintings for 'De Kosmos', the legendary New Age center, which stopped existing a long time ago.*

De Kosmos originated from underground culture which at first was concentrated in the youth center *Fantasio*, formerly called *Provadya*. *Fantasio* was situated at the Keizersgracht in Amsterdam, in the Felix Meritis building, which used to be the national bureau of the Communist Party of the Netherlands, where its newspaper *De Waarheid* used to be printed as well. At a certain moment *Fantasio* moved to the Prins Hendrik-kade, to the former youth hangout *Het Anker*. I worked there as 'house painter' together with Jan Holleman, whom I knew from the *Rietveld*. We didn't only paint the walls, but

also did the entire interior decoration.

We also made pieces of scenery and the like for performing bands and theatre companies. I had my own studio in the attic. We often invited visitors to join in on our wall decoration.

When *De Melkweg* opened at the Leidseplein, *Fantasio* became as good as superfluous as a youth center. Then the building was transformed into the spiritual center *De Kosmos*. We painted it in splendid white. The metamorphosis took place naturally as more and more 'mystic teachers' came over to give lectures in the tea-house. In the mean time I had got into BKR, *Beeldende Kunst Regeling*, of Amsterdam. Through Ger Lataster, who was a member of the BKR committee, I got the official order for a series of wall panels for the entrance of *De Kosmos*, very pleasing to do after all those years of unpaid work.

***Were the people there interested in art, maybe even in surrealism?*

At *De Kosmos* there wasn't any interest in art at all, though people were very busy painting mandala's, but that was it. When I had moved my studio to Prinseneiland, I only visited the place to make *Cosmic Paper*, a magazine edited by Belle Bruins, and to attend courses on Buddhism, Zen or Vipassana; the latter was taught by Bruno Mertens who became a very good friend of mine.



BONAIRE 1975

***Accidentally you name painters like Van Gogh, Gauguin and Leonardo Da Vinci, and you admire ancient Chinese drawing, but the 'Old Masters' don't seem to have taught you as much as Ernst, Lam and Matta did. Do you perhaps consider yourself to belong to the underground tradition of 'magic art', as Breton called the hidden history of the art that was dedicated to visualizing the mysterious and the sublime?*

Yes, I suppose it is the underground tradition Breton describes, that I belong to.

I've already mentioned that at the academy I mostly skipped the art history course. I didn't want to endure listening to teachers going on about Matisse or Morandi...but I did go to the *Rijksprentenkabinet* to look in hand at Seghers' and Piranesi's etchings, in white gloves, licking my lips. I also went to Den Bosch to see the big Jeroen Bosch exhibition, and to Kröller-Muller Museum for Redon.

André Breton invented the term 'beauté convulsive' which I find very striking and which you could translate as 'convulsive beauty'; things are in motion, moving from one condition to the next, becoming elusive, inimitable, erratic, unique if only for a moment. The outside world's matter evolves into the magic of the inner world. Present day art should also be like that, because we are living in a time of transition, all the world cultures are moving and influencing each other, all data are accessible in bookcases or computers, everywhere.

You know I'm fond of ancient eastern painting which had a direct connection to nature experience, that's the example I follow. Chinese and Japanese painters were also poets sometimes or cooperated with poets. Some of those paintings are full of poetic writing: a quarter painting, three quarters text! Drawing and writing were so very close. That's how I try to draw. And here as well there is a strong connection with surrealists like Miro, Masson or Matta who did the same thing.



With Philip West - Amsterdam 1977



With Antoni Zydron - Hannover 1992

When we came back after our years on Bonaire - we first moved into your place on the Oude Zijds for a while - there I started to go into Western art for the first time actually. I still have some sketches I made there, after the work of the old masters, and a few oil paint pastiches, Gauguin, Manet, De Chirico - the 'Hommage à De Chirico' that you own! Or the painting that refers to 'L' Absinthe' by Degas. In this way I forcefully tried to exorcise the 'schools of fishes' that had started to dominate my work. Due to the daily diving practice of many years, my mind had become saturated by the underwater world. I wasn't successful, though ... even now almost everything I make originates from those strange and alien underwater worlds. Even my rainforest paintings often resemble underwater jungles. When I lately showed my Liana leporello's to Michael Vandelaar, he immediately said: Those aren't liana's, but kelp plants. And he should know because kelp also grows in the South Australian sea where he lives.

Even though I love the art of painting, both its technique and content, I definitely do not belong to "the great European tradition". From the Western, European, traditional point of view, my work can only be called symbolist, not impressionist or lyric, because on the one hand I cross the borders of visual reality too far, and on the other hand I explore worlds that are hardly known and which definitely do not belong to the themes that dominate Western art. In spite of your influence and my affiliation with the Mouvement Phases-group, I have resisted calling myself a surrealist painter for a long time, because I detest a great deal of paint-work that is known as such. But because surrealism (also with capital S) has become a passion and I go to watch everything in the field and read whatever I can get hold of, I have adopted the title. Also a lot of our friends, colleague painters and poets are surrealists...and in the mean time my work has been labeled as such by the ladies and gentlemen art historians...

There are painters who produce surreal work and surrealists who paint.
Perhaps I belong to both categories.



HANNOVER 1993 - Dave Bobroske-John Welson-Tony Pusey-Philip West
Rik Lina-Paul Goodman-Rainer Wichering



SAO PAULO 1997 - Rik Lina-Miguel Lohlé-Daisy Peccinini-Fredy Flores-Jorge Leal Labrin - (Exhibition Phases - CAPA)

***You aren't the only surrealist to compare the creative process with alchemy. André Breton's motto was that he was looking for "the gold of time" - an alchemistic motto. Jorge Camacho has even become a real expert on the theories and formula of the ancient medieval alchemists. What is the meaning of alchemy to you?*

For me the creative process has always been a perfect unity of action and thought, the coincidence of chemistry of chance going together with the whole of goal-oriented disciplines of research. Also its ritual side, preparing for work, emptying the mind, the discipline, the daily practice of preparing supports, mixing paints, preparing other painting materials, grinding and preparing lithographic stones, etcetera, it is all related to alchemy and the magic of acting, of doing things. I haven't really emerged in the matter like Jorge Camacho or Kurt Seligmann, whose superb book *The Mirror of Magic* I read, and I can see the similarities between Chinese Taoists and European Middle-agers. I don't like to use clear symbols and formula, but the content is nevertheless sometimes noted by experts, as it appeared by the invitation to take part in the colloquium '*Discursos e Práticas Alquímicas*' organized by TriploV in the Portuguese city of Guimaraes in 2006.

The best way for me to answer your question is by citing a fragment of one

of your poems:

*You, intense Nature,
you have chosen me
to be your master.
I begin to understand
your paths now –
your immense desire
your deep roots
your immobile trees
and your intense fire.*

That's a real 'alchemist' poem to me. Indeed, I want to return to the sources of creation, to those of painted art. Literally and figuratively, I sometimes feel related to those magicians in the pre-historic caves: I like digging up my pigments, try to give shape to the unbelievable hidden force of nature, to show its beauty in these colors that are pure energy. But the secret of being able to do that is in the experience of everyday life.



DROOMSCHAAR 1 & 2 & 3/4 - 1990-1992

***From Moksha onwards, you have always been closely involved with magazines and publishers. As long as I've known you, you have been occupied with publications.*

I love working together creatively with other people and a magazine is a perfect medium to that end. At secondary school and with the sea scouts, I was already making leaflets. From 1968, when I got involved with *Moksha*

and *Cosmic Paper*, I collaborated with *Brumes Blondes* and also with the magazines of the artists' syndicate BBK69. Living on Bonaire I cooperated with the Dive Association magazine, and I made the design for the journal of Queen Angel, the women's diving club that was founded by Elizé and which still exists. With my Canadian-Dutch friends Paul Goodman and Dave Bobroske, I worked on *Thumor*, and later I got involved in *Or*, Wijnand Steemers's one-man magazine. In 1990 I started the anarcho-surreal magazine *Droomschaar*, and in 2010 in Portugal the magazine-object *Debout sur l'oeuf* appeared in which I worked in close cooperation with Miguel de Carvalho. Apart from those, I supplied drawings or texts for different other magazines, mostly in the surrealistic environment, but also in the divers' world.

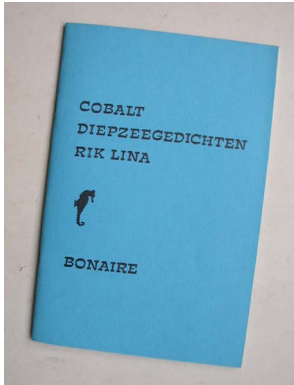
With the marginal publishing firm *Carrefour*, I tried to initiate self-publishing in The Netherlands, showing that with the copy-shop round the corner you could start doing your own publishing. My old friend Jowan Krabbendam helped me with the distribution; and we only made a new edition when we had earned enough money from the sale of former booklets. However small-scale *Carrefour* was, I enjoyed being able to publish things that I loved myself and which nobody knew about. Moreover it's a sport to make something special with as few means as possible.

***Have all those publishing projects had their function in your own work?*

I do these sort of things in the first place to be able to show my ideas regarding the visual medium, not only in the form of illustrations but also in the lay-out and an unusual design. In all my plastic work the experiment is foremost, the material aspect is very important, all techniques are welcome and I try them all for all possible subjects. That is also one of the reasons why I feel close to artists like Max Ernst: everything is allowed and possible, if only it penetrates to the core. Furthermore, I'm not only interested in my own subject, painting, but also in poetry, literature, philosophy, biology ... they all belong together.

***Theo van Baaren and Luc Tournier (pseudonym for Chris Engels) have urged you to write more poetry. Fortunately you followed their advice, as appears in several beautiful collections, although you remain very modest about them.*

When we were living on Bonaire, I took up writing poetry again, something I hadn't done since secondary school. We lived such an isolated existence - literally and figuratively - that I started to miss culture in all its aspects enormously, so poetry as well ... and I decided to start writing it myself and had the result: *Cobalt, Diepzeegedichten*, printed on the only little press on the island by the Fraters from Tilburg. You, and also Luc Tournier, Jan Elburg, and Cees Nooteboom, were enthusiast, this gave me courage to continue, and later to edit several more collections on my own, just for friends.



COBALT 1981



PLANKTON ZON 2006

***I find your poetry very special, because you are able to present themes that are very exceptional in modern poetry, like the underwater world, the reality of the rainforest, and many other experiences.*

Still I don't consider myself a poet but a painter who writes poetry incidentally while drawing. I consciously do not profile myself as a poet, because I respect real poetry too much and I realize that it is a discipline that is hard to combine with others. I don't really believe in 'double talents', one of them is bound to suffer.

***Still, there must be something that explains why your poetic feeling is so closely connected with the magic of you drawings and paintings.*

Poetry and visual art are indeed closely related according to me. Poetry and the autonomous visual arts have always belonged together in my view. Mind you: I say autonomous art, because most visual art is not so. Unfortunately most visual art is not poetic but decorative, or occasionally, if it is telling something, literal. And literature is different from poetry. Poetry is pure language, is the adventure of language; poetry is that which is becoming - or is intending to become - completely language. That's what attracts me in poetry: the unpredictable. And to me that is also the function of autonomous visual art, it should be an internal adventure. Internal adventures are secretive, they fascinate but they elicit more questions than they give answers. A good painting needs to have something disturbing according to me, even if it is beautiful. I do realize that the romantic painters and poets were already doing the same, and that the surrealists have been discovering completely new worlds in that respect. It is our duty to explore and expand those territories further. Beauty is relative and has to be redefined over and over.



Rik Lina - Sahara desert - Lybia 1965



Rik Lina - Atacama desert - Chile - 2006

*** have always been an advocate of collective creative activities. Long before you set up the CAPA group, you already had experience with the Hunebed group. Now you are the motor of the Cabo Mondego Section of Portuguese Surrealism.*

I'll give a clear survey of my most important collective activities:

#First there was the *Hunebed* group, which was active in the 70s. It was formed with co-commune member Jan Holleman and other friends, painters

and graphic artists (Sjoerd Bakker, Tony Sales, Fred Stakelbeek, Ben Peters, Tom Thyse, Frank Reyn...). At the *Hunebed* exhibition in Culemborg we made collective panels on the City Hall façade. With Jan Holleman I also cooperated in *Fantasio* and *De Kosmos*, where we integrated visitors as an element of our collective activities.

#Another collective activity in the same period was, as we called it: *Drükkerij De Spatel*, in the Jordaan area of Amsterdam, with graphic artist Tom Thijsse and Swiss painter Paul Hüsner. We shared a couple of lithographic presses, of which the main one had to be worked by at least two persons. Naturally a number of *cadavres exquis*, installations and collective pictures came into being.



CULEMBORG 1970 - Hunebed Group in action:
Johannes van Dam-Elizé Bleys-Rik Lina-Jan Holleman



PARIS 1992 - CAPA in action:
 Gerda van der Krans-Dave Bobroske-Rainer Wichering-
 Rik Lina-Jorge Leal Labrin

#In the early 90s, "CAPA - Collective Automatic Painting Amsterdam" - was started. In Paris I had met de Chilean painters Jorge Leal Labrin and Fredy Floris Kristoff. For Latin Americans automatism and collective paintings are much more normal than for painters of the individualistic western cultures, and therefore we immediately had a perfect understanding. Fredy was also living in Amsterdam and so we started with CAPA.

Soon we were joined by Miguel Lohlé (Argentina) and the Canadian Dave Bobroske, with whom I had been cooperating already for quite a while. Bobroske and the Canadian composer Paul Goodman made the magazine *Thumor* together, and they took part in the MIDIM electronic music group, a type of total theatre experimenting with automatism, which also included poet Wijnand Steemers and sculptor Gerda van der Krans. Paul and Gerda joined CAPA, together with poet - graphic artist Geert van Mulken, an old acquaintance from *Brumes Blondes*.

For the first years we had weekly collective sessions. Various friends and visitors contributed to the sessions, which sometimes turned into performances, for instance at the opening of an exhibition, personal or collective...in Amsterdam, Hannover or Paris.

#When I came to Portugal in order to organize three big exhibitions on contemporary surrealism with Miguel de Carvalho, the *Cabo Mondego Section of Portuguese Surrealism* came into being. That group consists of the poets Miguel de Carvalho and Joao Rasteiro and the painters Seixas Peixoto, Pedro

Prata and me. Different from CAPA, which is mainly working in studios, the Section prefers to work in open air, in nature or on quiet places in town, but their starting-point is the same: exploring automatism. Later on the painter Luis Morgadinho joined, and visiting artists contribute as well, like poets Sergio Lima, Miguel Flores Eloz, painters Marta Peres, Gregg Simpson, Michael Vandelaar, Celeste Tavares.

#Finally there is the painters' collective *Cornucopia*. It operates exclusively by mail: John Welson from Wales, Gregg Simpson from Canada and myself from Amsterdam or Portugal.

#I have been involved in similar collective activities by mail before, with other artists like Henri Plaat, Dave Bobroske, Allan Graubard, Peter van der Heijden and many others. In that case the form of automatism differs because the suddenness, the instant composing is absent. You get the opportunity to alter the work thoughtfully, but its purpose, tackling the painting with automatic techniques, remains the same, as are the surprising results.



The CABO MONDEGO SECTION of Portuguese Surrealism - 2008
Seixas Peixoto-Rik Lina-Miguel de Carvalho-João Rasteiro

***In what way can the additional power and creative energy of collective works be discerned?*

The early surrealists preferred the creation to be collective and even anonymous - they operated as a group, a collective body. That's something that has always fascinated me, especially because I strongly experienced this sense of belonging as a young boy, when I played in a jazz band for a while. So I thought something similar should be possible in visual arts as well.

Art historian and CoBra expert Graham Birtwistle recognized it immediately when he watched CAPA at work - and he bought a painting! Apart from the fact that working together with several artists - in an automatic way, at one and the same time - may produce a richer, more interesting piece; and that it is evidently 'instructive' and stimulating to watch others at work, the most important additional force is a powerful expansion of the unconscious territory. While that territory is growing by the simultaneous application of several techniques - as proposed by Adrien Dax - it becomes more multidimensional when several artists work together automatically. What appears is always a complete surprise. The result is hardly ever 'beautiful' - at least not in the conventional meaning. This type of work has its own aesthetics.



CAPA in action: Jan Giliam-Rik Lina-Dave Bobroske - Coïmbra -Portugal 2008

***In your interview with that Oporto newspaper, you said that you prefer to return the source of the art of painting, far from the loud, hyped-up 'art' of contemporary jet-set and big business. It can't be denied that 'serious' art that explores reality, that is profound and able to throw a new light on the experience of things, has been more and more marginalized by the modern capitalist market and the shallow cultural climate. What is your view on the future of meaningful art? Will it forever be banned to subcultures, to the underground? Or is it conceivable that the tide will turn?*

There isn't any evidence of a great change anywhere - and I'm afraid there won't be for some time. That marginalization had already started in the 60s and, as you point out, is related to the rising commercialization of culture, the so-called art business on the one hand, and the public disinterest on the other. An artist is either an almost unreachable, mostly long deceased God(dess), or an idiot "eating our tax money". The latter mass conception is very convenient for politics and commerce and is therefore being maintained by the media. Whatever can be done against that? One of those 'Gods', Marcel Duchamp, in his days already advised young artists to keep away from the spotlights, long before the rise of 'underground culture'. So, marginalization is coming from two sides, and in my case it is by choice.

***You have lived through this evolution. Still you haven't lost faith in the honest, authentic adventure.*

Already at the academy I understood that things were going to be hard for me. I consciously chose the subjects 'autonomous painting' and lithography because I knew I wouldn't earn anything with the first and might earn something with the latter by printing pictures for others, which I fortunately never have been obliged to do, by the way.

It did become very hard for us ... still I think we have been lucky, because whenever we were in dire straits, a small miracle happened: I sold something, got an assignment, a grant or something else ... I don't need luxury - I accept anything as long as I can continue working. And I have the incredible fortune to be married to Elizé who has exactly the same opinion. She thinks and lives like an artist, she understands precisely what is making me tick. Without her I would not have achieved anything!

Being an artist, you need some appreciation, you don't work for yourself alone, feedback is important. I am pleased with the small circle of admirers, which is international - and that also helps. My work isn't so difficult, but it seems to be weird, especially to most Dutch people. My tropical pallet is often found much too loud in Holland. In the BKR period I once heard that my work was classified in the 'Surinam school', whatever that may be ... The motives I paint are totally strange for many people, some may only be recognized by scuba divers. Technically my work is fine, but that doesn't mean much, there are so many fine painters, the competition is murderous. And on its own, that's all right for me.

Surviving in the present art climate is a matter of persisting; talent and skill aren't sufficient. Nowadays a management course is scheduled at the academy... as if that would help! Should I have succumbed to my father's will and have gone to managementschool Nijenrode after all? Definitely not! As soon as I got the chance, I hitch-hiked to the Sahara: that's the place where you can learn about genuine living, which is what the arts must be about, instead of that bullshit about how to profile oneself within the gallery circuit!



With Jorge Leal Labrin - Santiago de Chile 2006



With Sergio Lima - Figueira da Foz 2009



With Mário Cesariny - Lisboa 2001



With Ted Joans - Paris 1990

***The international surrealistic exhibitions of past years, in Portugal, Chili, America, show that a lot of artists in a great many countries are attracted by the surrealist ideas in all its variety. You have never made a secret of the inspiration you got from Ernst, Lam and Matta. But of course inspiration is provided by new talents, your artistic fellow travelers.*

Fellow travelers. Passengers, as you called your friends and fellow artists in one of your poetry books! A very precise term, because that's what they are - even if they have boarded different ships.

Unfortunately, some of my friends in art have already passed away ... Such as Philip West, a genuine alchemist, who explored the jungles of the Amazon and the Orinoco, at the same moment I was roaming the underwater world ... like Mario Cesariny, who opened lots of doors for me in Portugal, and still does ... like Antoni Zydron, the shaman from Poland with his totems painted on hides ... Like the ever wandering troubadour Ted Joans ... like Jan Schlechter Duvall in his ancestral house of spirits ... all gone, but their work is still influencing me. Authors are also inspiring me constantly: Julio Cortàzar, Breyten Breytenbach, Rikki Ducornet, Octavio Paz ...

***Which new names, for instance on those recent international exhibitions, can give you a similar shock of recognition and energy?*

It's not only about painters, the poets had a prominent place as well. In the 3 Portuguese exhibitions that I helped install, the poems were not only published in the catalogue but also hung among the paintings, yours also, as well as Jan Bervoets's, Allan Graubard's, Sergio Lima's, Ludwig Zeller's ... They were presented with the visions by Virginia Tentindo or Jorge Kleiman, both from Argentina, the fatal flowers of John Welson, or the Picardian fairytale forests of Guy Girard ... all very inspiring work.

Among the young ones I'd like to mention the glass-coral reefs by Antillean painter-diver Jan Giliam; Patrick Hourihan of the adventurous SLAG group in London; the anarchist birds-worlds by Canadian Laura Corsiglia; Beatriz Hausner, the Chilean from Canada with her enchanting poetry.

***Who do you pay special attention to because they do something exceptional?*

A number of them have already been mentioned here, like the 'automatistes pur sang' Jorge Leal Labrin and David Bobroske or John Welson; Kathleen Fox of South Africa who uses living invertebrates to shape her paintings; Jan Bervoets's militant anarchy of language. Those recent exhibitions of contemporary surrealism offer a fine, but definitely incomplete image of this surrealistic universe.



COIMBRA 2008 - with Miguel de Carvalho

***Everything points to the fact that the attitude of life and manner of working called surrealism, makes the public suspicious and shy - and not only the public, but also the art historians, museum people, art critics (as far as any are left) and even most fellow artists.*

The artists and writers who called themselves surrealists were immediately considered to be heretics by the bourgeois culture; afterwards they became the heretics of revolutionary communism; next, heretics in the consumer society; and now again in the prevailing market economy. Only the commercially successful production of kitsch by the firm Dali and its consorts is tolerated; meanwhile, that kind of kitsch has become the biggest and most persistent anti-propaganda for ideas to make life more passionate and animated.

Everything you say is true, unfortunately. And it is sad to notice that the

ideals Freedom Love and Poetry hardly appeal to anyone anymore. Utopian thought is 'out of fashion'.

***Can't anything be done to make the ideas and ideals of a 'surrealistic civilization', as it was called by Vincent Bounoure, more attractive for the new generation, and therefore less menacing?*

You are talking about a 'surrealistic civilization' now, while you used to call it 'a kind of secret league'. Surrealism is both and still it isn't, because for almost everybody surrealism remains something 'dalianesque' or in the best case something so weird that it is 'almost surrealistic' ... Of course the eagerness of young artists for recent manifestations of contemporary surrealism are a marvelous to experience. Hopefully it will get a new follow-up, and why not? In the days of our Coimbra-exhibition, we had no idea either that the enthusiasm would be spreading so fast to Chili and the USA, but the Chileans and the Americans did use our e-mail list for their invitations to participants.

It is and remains a peculiarly small group, even if it is world-wide...

***Will it therefore inevitably carry on in the intimacy of soul mates, overshadowed by markets, fashions and media hypes, without any ambition to rouse the addicted consumers and to change the world?*

I like to regard surrealism as an ancient tree. It might have been broken by a storm or even chopped down, but still new shoots are coming ... and its roots reach very, very deep.

Bloemendaal –Figueira da Foz 2012
(translation Moniek Lauwers – Antwerp 2013)



CABO MONDEGO SECTION - Grottoes of Buracas - Portugal 2016 -
Will Alexander-Miguel de Carvalho-Luiz Morgadinho-Seixas Peixoto-
Pedro Prata-Rik Lina-Richard Waara-Jan Giliam



AMSTERDAM - CAPA 2017 - with Jan Giliam