

Paul De Vree in 5 steps

WORDS

Paul De Vree was a poet and visual artist. His work consists of distinct consecutive periods. Having permanently stopped writing traditional poetry in the early 1950s, he went through the following stages: audiovisual and sound poetry, concrete-visual poetry, visual poetry and poesia visiva. Thus, his starting point was traditional poetry and from there he moved onto the visual. His work is in the tradition of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Marinetti, Van Ostaïjen, Van Doesburg and Dada.

My personal view of poetry is an evolutive one: experiment in progress and as far as possible different disciplines in fusion. So I put into practice the dadaistic rule that there is no nobility in the world of words and no limits in the world of creation. (1970)

EROS & EROSION

The various periods that De Vree went through are chiefly characterised by a difference in style or form, rather than any shift in content: De Vree was always looking for new forms in order to convey the content that was a constant throughout his complete oeuvre.

That content revolves around the poles of Eros (love, security, euphoria) and erosion (death, transience) and as an extension thereof the opposing notions of peace (adequacy, well-being, acceptance, internalisation) and dissolution (inadequacy, passion, refusal, accusation).

ENGAGEMENT & REVOLT

Central to Paul De Vree's work is social engagement. This is present in his work right from the start, but becomes a particularly important principle as from the period of poesia visiva. Whereas initially the visual element still played an important aesthetic role, from the second half of the sixties it was used primarily in terms of socio-critical engagement. De Vree mostly used visual images from the mass media for this purpose. These images are accompanied by a sometimes ironic or satirical text. This was De Vree's way of appealing to the conscience and awareness of the viewer through all kinds of associations.

Since the wars in Asia and the May Revolution in Paris (1968) I felt the need to widen the aesthetical information with a greater world conscience, not to create a special engaged poetry, but in order to make people more aware of absurdity, danger, responsibility and love. A lot of my visual poems and most of my sound-texts go that way. (1970)

NETWORKER

Besides being a poet and visual artist, Paul De Vree was also a critic, essayist, novelist, publisher and organiser of exhibitions, events and film festivals. He was part of the international artistic and intellectual avant-garde movement of his time.

The poet is no longer a poet of a region, but a 'person of the world'. We belong to a universal society, and in that universal society there are many things that we must be able to put right if we are to continue living, if we are to survive. (1981)

SMOKE

The art of poetry must adapt to new media. (1979)

Paul De Vree creates his poetry using different media and on a whole range of supports. However, paper is very often the platform used for written or printed text (handwriting, ideogram, typogram, typographic and graphic pictogram, cutting etc.), photo-collage, photomontage, objects, or even a simple sketch, sometimes completed with paint, textile or another material (stamps, rubber stamps, envelopes, fallen and dried leaves and flowers, wood, stone, bronze etc.). From 1976 De Vree developed the so-called 'smoke technique', which consisted of making drawings in the black soot residue from a candle on a sheet of paper. The use of photography dominates his visual works: photographic material is processed in De Vree's poems in the form of collages and montages, accompanied by text, comments that demystify the codes of the constant flow of information.