

## *De lijst van Dubuffet – Meesterwerken uit de Prinzhorncollectie*

Opening Speech by Beatrix Ruf, Director Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

Thank you for the invitation to speak at the opening of this wonderful exhibition. My name is Beatrix Ruf and I am Director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. It is great to see that there continues to be an interest in the work and thinking of Jean Dubuffet in the Netherlands.

I am very proud of the Stedelijk's important role in establishing Dubuffet's relationship with the Netherlands under the directorship of Willem Sandberg. He acquired several works for the Stedelijk collection. This relationship was reinforced during the directorship of Edy de Wilde, who not only acquired several works, but also organized two exhibitions, and visited Dubuffet's studio on a number of occasions.

Dubuffet coined the term *Art Brut* in 1949 in his legendary manifest *L'Art brut préféré aux arts culturels*. Artists like Adolf Wölfli or Aloise, amongst many other untaught artists, took an anti-cultural position against the over-sophistication of conventional culture. Dubuffet also started his own collection of *outsider art*, though modest in size. Compared to the collections of psychiatrists, such as Walter Morgenthaler and Hans Prinzhorn, Dubuffet's collection had a different purpose. His aim was to free the works from any association with psychopathology and to recognize them as examples of free and individual forms of creativity.

Dubuffet was of course not the only one. In our museum collection we find many key works by artists that have drawn inspiration from art forms and cultures that may be considered 'outsider art'.

Think for example of classical avant-garde artists such as Picasso, Gauguin, Larionov, artists from Die Brucke and Der Blaue Reiter, Matisse, Modigliani or Paul Klee. They were in one way or another working from a so called 'primitivist' fascination, aimed at countering western rationalism and culture.

After the second World War the Cobra group continued this mode of working with a strong fascination for art produced by children. A movement shown for the first time at the Stedelijk and a major part of the collection ever since.

'Outsider Art' remains a complex term. First of all, it suggests that there is an *inside*. And what is this 'insider art' then? Is it the art that museums collect and show? And is all art in museums immediately turned into 'insider art' – even though it was produced by 'outsiders' or from an 'outsider' perspective?

At this moment in the contemporary art world we see many references to this inside/outside thinking. You can see it when you visit the Venice Biennale or Documenta in Kassel, or read the reviews. That what was overlooked, marginalized, operating outside of the cultural centre is brought to the table, motivated by a strong political agenda.

Whatever we may think of this, museums have the responsibility to critically address these issues as well. Conventional categories and hierarchies are shifting, voices speak up demanding an opening up of the conventional canon, and a radical democratization of the art world. Internet makes it possible for anyone to make their work accessible and share it on new platforms. The established ways of judging, distributing and commercialization are being challenged.

In this respect the value of this wonderful exhibition lies in its ability to shed light on the interests and fascinations of Dubuffet and what he appreciated in certain works. It is not always clear what inspires artists and how exactly. What is similar, though, is the continuous fascination for Outsider Art, starting with Prinzhorn and Dubuffet.

And on July first two exhibitions will be added: sculptures of Dubuffet in the gardens of the Rijksmuseum and at the Stedelijk we will show the full range of our Dubuffet collection.

I invite you all to come!

### **Bibliography**

David Maclagan. *Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace*. London: Reaktion Books, 2009.

Maurice Tuchman and Carol S. Eliel (eds.). *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Princeton University Press, 1992.