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## Project 'Karel Appel Was Hier', Texts Martijn Sandberg 2006-2010, The Karel Appel House

Karel Appel returns to his native town of Amsterdam in an artistic way. The official opening of the Karel Appel House, Dapperstraat 7 took place on 25 April 2010. The house is a tribute to the famous artist, who was born in the neighbourhood.

The Key Housing Association has made the Karel Appel House available for use as a temporary dwelling, at the disposal of artists from home and abroad who work at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam. Dus Architects designed the interior, and the artist Martijn Sandberg has created a gable sign for the Karel Appel House, in the form of a bronze apple.

Gable sign 'Karel Appel Was Hier', a 'memo'

On the façade of the Karel Appel House, a message - a 'memo' - lingers: 'Karel Appel Was Hier' ('Karel Appel Was Here'). The words have been bitten out of an apple, almost to its core.

The golden coloured bronze half apple is attached to the façade of the house at eye level, as a tangible icon. The gable sign is directly recognisable to everyone, young and old, foreign or not.

The design for marking the Karel Appel House directly plays with the questions 'who', 'what', 'when' and 'where' with the aid of a sculpture, cast in the form characteristic of the name Karel Appel. Referring to the title of a famous series of work by Karel Appel, the bronze apple answers 'Inquiring Children' - of all ages.

Gable sign 'Karel Appel Was Hier', design and materialisation

As a basis for the gable sign volume - the image - a real apple was scanned three-dimensionally. A laser scanner was utilised to generate the digital file to be used, working according to the principle of phototriangulation.

After the real apple was scanned, the file generated was transformed into a polygon model with a high resolution. This file was subsequently digitally adapted based on the design for figuration of the artwork. The digital 3D-file was then materialised into a full-scale three-dimensional model of the artwork. This 'mother' model for the gable sign was ultimately cast in bronze, via a successive series of moulds and further partially finished with an 'apple green' like patina.

Gable sign 'Karel Appel Was Hier', a brand image

"What you see here is the gable sign. I immediately thought of the apple as an image because it is about Karel Appel. And I've gouged this text out of the apple: 'Karel Appel Was Hier'. It is cast in bronze and is the colour of a golden apple. With a patina of apple green."

Isn't that rather obvious, an apple?

"Well perhaps it's very obvious. But that's exactly the reason why you should use it, because of course there's only one Karel Appel. It's a kind of 'brand image' almost, a Karel Appel brand image. The famous Dutch artist has also become an 'apple', of course. An apple as 'symbol' for Karel Appel."

Isn't it a little small for indicating that this is going to be a very important place in the future?

"As I just said: there's only one person called 'Karel Appel'. So of course you actually mustn't stray too far from an apple, with regard to form, volume, relationship. I mean if you blow it up it becomes a melon. It's not about 'Joep Meloen\*'), but 'Karel Appel'. That's why it should keep fairly close to the apple. It isn't an advertisement on a house facade, literally. Karel Appel himself is so generally incorporated into our culture, that it is a sort of advertisement of itself. Not just this image, this gable sign is a brand image, but Karel Appel himself is also a brand image, of course. Just as Karel Appel also stands for 'the painter, the 'wild, savage painter'. In the music that he made, 'Musique Barbare', he says: "I do not paint, I hit! I do not paint, I hit!" (Excerpts interview 'Onbekende Bekenden' H. Ruijvekamp/ AT5, 2008)

\*) 'Joe Melon' (humorous character in Dutch film)

Gable sign 'Karel Appel Was Hier' and the Dappermarkt

The form of the gable sign may itself also be seen as a metaphor for the Karel Appel House. The gable sign is literally a core. The form and location of the 'Karel Appel Was Hier' gable sign likewise involves the environment of local public space in the artwork. There is a relationship between the form of the gable sign and the surrounding market nearby. The Karel Appel House looks out upon the market. Karel Appel has secured a definitive place in the art market with his work. Apples can be obtained in the market.

The Dappermarkt may be compared to the art market, where all sorts of products - apples and pears - are compared with each other as to 'freshness' and as to price. The wares are presented, exhibited and offered for sale on market stalls - which are comparable to galleries and art fairs. The gallery owners and curators talk up the products.

The apple form of the gable sign gives the nearby market an extra layer of significance, as it were. The gable sign refers to the market, which can be connected to the artwork and Karel Appel's further artistic life.

'An Appel please!'

An Appel or an apple? On the market you hear: 'An apple please!' That is also said in the art market, when a real Appel is purchased: 'An Appel please!'

'Snoep verstandig, eet een appel!' ('Snack sensibly, eat an apple!')

The 'Biting out' of the 'Karel Appel Was Hier' figuration from the apple puts me in mind of that advertising campaign from my early youth: 'Snack sensibly, eat an apple!'

Karel Appel and the stylistic feature of free expression

Karel Appel's work is symbolic of post-war 'expressionistic art'. When looking at Karel Appel's work, it was and is often said: 'My child can do that as well.' The question is of course, that you as adult should ask yourself: 'If my child can do it, can I do it too?', or 'If a child can, can I do it too?' Resemblance between the style of Karel Appel's painting and the handwriting of the child was the conscious intent of the artist and the Cobra movement; back to free expression, spontaneous and original children's drawing. The return to and the direct reference to this characteristic 'childish' handwriting was a conscious artistic choice in designing the artwork. Back to the child's experience. It is back to the spontaneity and environment of the child - for the Second World War had made it very clear that the adult human being had lost his innocence forever. The style and design of the Cobra artwork is based on this concept.

The gable sign 'Karel Appel Was Hier' and the idiom of the child

The gable sign is in fact kin to the 'idiom', the images and the visual language, characteristic of children's handwriting and their perception of the environment. The design of the gable sign appeals to the idiom and environment of children, just as the work of Karel Appel and other artists belonging to the post-war international Cobra movement consciously refers to the visual language of children. There is a children's programme called 'Het Klokhuis' ('The Core'). The design of the gable sign - the core, the eaten apple - somehow made me think of the image of the flying pumpkin with children sitting in it. I remember seeing that on television in my childhood. If I'm not mistaken, it was during an episode of 'Kunt u mij de weg naar Hamelen vertellen, mijnheer?' ('Can you tell me how to get to Hamelin, mister?'), a Dutch children's series in the Seventies.

The gable sign 'Karel Appel Was Hier' and homo ludens

Although I perhaps must have seen the work of the famous artist earlier, my first conscious acquaintance as a youth with the work of Karel Appel and other Cobra artists was during 'Westkunst' ('West Art'), an exhibition in 1981 in Cologne. The exhibition presented an overview of contemporary art of the West from 1939 onwards.

Among other things, a few painted wooden assemblages 'Vragende Kinderen' ('Inquiring Children') by Karel Appel were exhibited here and paintings by Constant from the series 'Verschroeiide Aarde' ('Scorched Earth'). It is these works of Appel and Constant in particular that have always remained in my memory.

The last great exhibition that I saw of Karel Appel, was in the following year -1982- in the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam. The wall painting and the Appel bar in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam were familiar images to me - as they were for every other frequent visitors to the museum. I once saw the documentary 'De Werkelijkheid van Karel Appel' ('The Reality of Karel Appel') by Jan Vrijman. We see a painting beast at work. The film contains sound fragments from the piece 'Musique Barbare', that Appel specially composed for the soundtrack of the film. Karel Appel yells: "I do not paint, I hit! I do not paint, I hit!" An often quoted statement by Karel Appel is: "I just mess about a bit", but by then he knew better of course.

Many years later, I grasped that the free expression in the visual work of the Cobra artists is also purposely designed and carefully assembled. The 'spontaneous' visual language is well considered and constructed. The artwork refers to the idiom, the stylistic features of the child's drawing and the child's perception of his environment. The free expression in the work of the Cobra artists is literally 'portrayed' as it were. The artwork is in fact not a product of this free expression, but is the representation, the visualisation of free expression. I find that a fascinating aspect of the work of Karel Appel and the Cobra artists. Free expression is a style with features, a consciously designed stylistic form.

A programme, a manifesto underlies the representation of free expression. Homo ludens was the aspiration, 'the playing human being'. The form of the gable sign 'Karel Appel Was Hier' is recognisable to everyone - young and old, foreign or not. An apple core on the façade of the Karel Appel House, as playful artwork for playing and inquiring children - of all ages.

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