



# MOTHERSHIP

## Building bridges in art

Rotterdam-based Mothership is a company which produces works of art for clients and artists. By building a bridge between the art world and the business community, Mothership searches for opportunities to realise diverse art projects. Mothership founder and director Jeroen Everaert (43) is a man with a mission. 'Art has long been viewed as something for the educated upper class. My mission is to show that art is also for Joe Average. If they don't go to museums or galleries, I will bring it to them!'

**E**veraert was working as the managing director of a crane company when he began to feel that he had really missed something by not studying art. To make up for this unfortunate oversight, he entered the art academy, working as a director by day and studying art at night. As soon as he got his diploma, he tendered his resignation at the crane company and started working as an autonomous artist, making installations. After a year of creating his own artworks, Everaert found out that working alone in a studio just wasn't for him. An exposition in which he participated led to his next job as partner in MAMA, a publicly funded visual arts and culture organisation based in Rotterdam. During his time with MAMA, Everaert lost his faith in the subsidy-driven art world; it was this disillusionment which eventually led to the establishment of Mothership. 'MAMA was very successful and we managed to pull in loads of funding. Instead of the intended six projects a year, we man-

aged to accomplish 26. At year's end the balance was made up. The subsidy board was more than happy with what we had done, but to our disbelief, our subsidy was cut off anyway! To me, that was a devastating blow. I feel that hard work should be rewarded. I was disgusted by the whole subsidy system and I realised it was time for me to head in a new direction.'

### How does Mothership work?

'We are basically an art production company. Just like you have movie producers or music producers, we are producers for art; we bring artists and clients together. When clients are interested in doing a project with Mothership or are looking for some form of art, we contact them and take stock of what they are looking for. We then try to find an artist we feel might be cut out for the job. We propose some work from different artists to the client. When they see something they like, we ask the artist to submit a proposal.'

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Jeroen Everaert

## You act as the middleman?

'I guess you could put it that way. We take care of the business end of things so the artists get to focus on what they actually do best: creating. On the other hand, Mothership advises clients in business, financial and content-related matters to help them realise their desired art project.'

## Don't you feel that commerce and art are mutually exclusive?

'Not necessarily; commerce is merely trading. You make something and somebody wants to buy it. The thing is, you need to find that one someone who wants to buy it from you. We have an extensive network of both artists and clients, so we mediate. There is nothing wrong in that. Not being dependent on subsidies or public funding also gives an artist more freedom.'

## Still, you get assignments and need to take the clients' needs into account?

'Yes, but we always maintain our autonomy. Doing cool projects is our main priority; money has never been my objective. We want to do things we have always wanted to try, just do crazy stuff that goes beyond your wildest imagination. Like a mosaic swimming pool, or installing dozens of bizarre chandeliers in a casino... That is the reason we visit venues like the Millionaire Fair. There you meet people that can provide you with the budgets to get these projects off the ground.'

## Mothership wants to make art available to a wider audience. Does that require a different approach?

'If you want to take things outside, to your audience, it means you are working on a different scale. You need to bring it 'in your face'. You can't just take a couple of objects and stick them together with tape, this sort of conceptual art doesn't work in this case. You have to work with artists who make work that is understandable, comprehensible. The world of conceptual art is fine, there's an audience for that, but it's not my world. I want to focus on work that appeals to people, that is accessible, that makes people think. Work that is more functional.'

## So you promote art in general by making it more easily accessible?

'Art is still considered as something for the educated upper class, as something boring to the majority of people. In our projects, we try to get people involved. Next time they might even visit a museum or a gallery. Dutch media tycoon and musical producer Joop van den Ende is a big role model in this regard. What he has done is unprecedented. By staging big popular musicals such as

Les Miserables and The Lion King, he managed to get a large audience into the theatre, people who normally might not have gone there. If you put on a Shakespeare production they won't come, but if you offer something more accessible you can get people involved. You create an interest among a broader audience, and those same people suddenly realise visiting a theatre can mean something for them as well.'

## You seem to really have a functional approach, relatively unconcerned with whether it's considered art in a traditional sense.

'One thing we always tell our younger artists who work for us is: please don't make art. Make what you feel, create what comes to mind. Leave it to the art critics to judge whether it was art or not. I think this is something you can't really tell for another 100 years and then you'll be dead anyway.'

## What is the most prestigious project you have done so far?

'That must be the Rotterdam Bombardment Periphery, a project we did in 2007 and 2008 to commemorate the bombings of Rotterdam during WWII. We came up with the plan of putting loads of space cannons aimed at the sky, each producing 7,000 Watts, along the bombardment periphery, a line showing the contours of where Rotterdam was bombarded and set on fire. On 14 May 2007, the project took place for the first time. We had 128 space cannons mapping out the contours on the low-hanging cloud cover. It was an amazing event which drew a lot of attention.'

## Does Dutch art have a lot of potential?

'I have the feeling that Dutch art can become very big, in the same way Dutch architecture and design are doing so well now. There seems to be a sort of flow in Holland... designers giving their fresh views on what they think design is or can be, and I feel that the next generation of Dutch artists is ready to show art in a different way. The artistic climate is good in Holland. I think that projects like we do are ready to go international. Just a different way of making art: bigger, with a sense of humour, more accessible projects.'

## And you fit right in there?

'I feel like a fish in the sea. As an artist, I was extremely unhappy all alone in my workshop, and as a businessman they always called me the artist! I had long hair, I never wore a suit. Now, in the world of art, people call me the businessman. I am a happy man.'

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