

CORNELIUS ROGGE: ARMADA

Activity area

This summer in the activity area in the sculpture garden, the museum presents the boat project by Cornelius Rogge (Amsterdam, 1932): an installation comprising 16 boats, the latest of which date from 2010, that together appear to float like an Armada on a sea of waving grass. These are museum boats: on the water they used to be carriers of all manner of cargo, now they stand aground and carry stories and legends. They have an undercarriage on wheels, which eases their material voyage; they tell tales of arrival and moving onwards and the memories of the water. The vessels are part of an Armada of soul ships. This term 'Soul Ship' is a combination of something tangible (the ship) and something immaterial (the soul). The ship is the pre-eminent vehicle of crossing, of transformation. And transformation, metamorphosis, change is the connecting thread in Rogge's work.

Cornelius Rogge is an exponent of modern art in the Netherlands from the period after the Second World War. Having grown up during war in the Kinkerbuurt district in Amsterdam, he was educated at the Rijksacademie voor Beeldende Kunsten and the Gerrit Rietveld academy. Averse to coercion and all things imposed, he set to mastering the techniques himself, the difficulty of which is sometimes evident and has resulted in emotive and tense work. He cannot be categorized in a particular tradition. His development was highly individual and he uses his own formal idi-

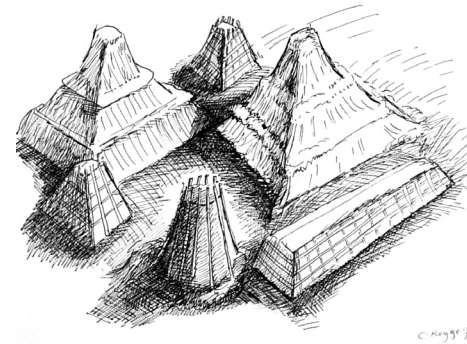
om. Since 1960 he has, and still does, exhibited regularly in galleries and museums and his work is included in various private collections. Despite his now advanced age, Rogge is by no means an artist retired; he continues to work on new projects, he continues to change. His body of work is very diverse, consisting of groups of works around a certain theme, such as the boats in this case. Over the years, Rogge has worked with many different materials and techniques; he feverishly investigates the possibilities of these materials, often alternating from hard to soft materials and vice versa.

Timeless themes such as transience, religious motifs, primitive cultures, mysterious rituals and classical mythology recur frequently. He uses religious themes without their original connotation, thus leaving space for free interpretation. His work often has an alienating effect. He wants to give his own meaning; when things are imposed he experiences this as feeling trapped. Every sculpture has different layers, which become apparent in phases and that peel off like an onion: first the exterior, then a continuation of subsequent layers. In all his sculptures, the spiritual and material always go hand in hand in a succession of metamorphoses within Rogge's individual mythology. The conspicuous aspect of the metamorphoses is that the sculptures bear virtually no relation to the tradition of sculptural art. They originate from other worlds.

It is striking that Rogge frequently regards his work with a certain distance and with the same amazement as his observers. The work appears not to have been produced, it simply occurs, it reveals itself. Rogge is engaged in a continuous, introvert voyage of discovery.

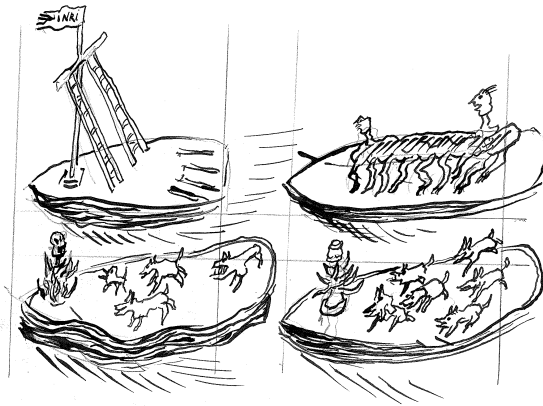
Rogge's father was an explorer, his mother a theosophist and both were influential to him. His father's stories about the Dutch East Indies, where he travelled around for years as a geologist, must certainly have been an influence. Cornelius Rogge himself does not travel from continent to continent, but he is in search of unprecedented experiences and discoveries in sculptures. Spiritual sources are converted into material, the inner world is transformed into objects. Journeying and migration, the nomadic life, returns time and again in Rogge's work, here in the boat installation and in the *Tent*

Project, which is on display elsewhere in the sculpture garden. The *Tent Project* is one of Rogge's best-known pieces. On a field in the sculpture garden (opposite the tower by Snelson), set against a background wall of rhododendrons, stand six large tents made of matt brown canvas: two in the shape of a ziggurat (step pyramid), two cone-shaped tents and two in the form of truncated pyramids. The first four stand amidst a forest of guy ropes, the other two stand unsupported. The tents are very recognizable, they are reminiscent of a village in Egypt or in South America or India, but also – certainly for many summer visitors who stay at the nearby campsites on the Veluwe – of camping tents. However, none of Rogge's tents has an entrance, which also makes them coverings, keepers of a secret that will not reveal itself to the observer. They are inaccessible and the shapes are uncommon. The form encourages thinking, looking, contemplation. The darkness inside the tents refers to the bowels of the earth, to the mystery of nature.



Referring to this project, the artist comments in the Gelderlander newspaper: 'A tent is an everyday perception, a legitimate first thought when confronted with this work. I offer my objects to the public in this sort of familiar packaging, in order to stoke their surprise, that it is certainly not a tent. Thus that something else can emerge that in its everyday appearance is not everyday. What I intend to point out with this is that all our perceptions can quite easily be cliché. My idea is that there are new areas to discover behind the forms, which are completely unknown, but which are well-worth discovering.[...]'

The boats in the activity area are boats with a variable cargo: a kind of rebus with all manner of elements. Religious Christian symbolism is explicitly present. Some elements are recognizable (the animals, the ladders, the column), the combinations and the associations of these are left to the observer to fill in. This is also why Rogge refuses to give the individual boats a title: that would guide the observer too much in his or her own experience of the objects. The artist challenges the observers to make their own associations with the images supplied and to interpret these in combination with each other.



Rogge is a familiar artist in the Kröller-Müller Museum: work from various periods is included in the collection.

In 1986 Rogge received the David Röell Prize from the Prins Bernhardfonds for his exceptional contribution to Dutch culture. In 2005 he was appointed Officer in the Orde van Oranje-Nassau in honour of his 45 years of artistic practice.