

HEAR THE WORLD

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE CULTURE OF HEARING

WORLD

ISSUE NINETEEN

TAKE THAT
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BRYAN ADAMS

Herzog & de Meuron's parking garage in Miami
Théâtre de la Gaîté Lyrique
Jenson Button
On the nature and culture of screaming
The voice of Adele



An orchestral interior

How Niels van Eijk and Miriam van der Lubbe fused rooms, furniture, uniforms, fabrics, cutlery and cups into a total acoustic experience.

Once, design was considered an holistic means of attempting to improve people's living conditions "from the spoon to the city", in the words of Max Bill. Today, however, we tend to place total works of art in design in the past – for instance Arne Jacobsen's legendary SAS Royal Hotel in Copenhagen, for which he designed, between 1956 and 1960, not only the architecture, but also the complete interior from the furniture through the luminaires to the fabrics and cutlery. Can we still group such different design fields together as a convincing total artwork today?

A few years ago, the Dutch design duo Miriam van der Lubbe and Niels van Eijk received a commission that every designer must dream of: They were asked to conceive a concept, together with Philips Ambient Experience Design, for the comprehensive redesign of the somewhat dated Muziekgebouw concert hall in Eindhoven, built in the early 1990s. It was to include everything "from the façade to the coffee cups". "The building had brilliant acoustics, but otherwise was terrible," according to Niels van Eijk. "Everything was in the wrong place, and in the wrong colors. We wanted to enable visitors to redevelop a connection to this building." Thus the two designers conceived their design from the inside out and not only focused on the overall impression, but also the tiniest detail.

They designed the high glass entrance façade and the foyers, the stairwells, auditoria, changing rooms, bars and bistros, the carpets, ceilings and furniture, down to the staff uniforms, coffee cups and boxes for the programs.

The designers wanted to enable visitors to find their own way through the building intuitively, without having to follow direction signs. Which is why, aside from a couple of names on doors and in foyers, there are no signs in the building. Instead, the sound-absorbing ceilings in the foyers consist of countless LED-studded tiles that show visitors the way. The high-tech equipment that permeates the entire building is generally hidden. When selecting fabrics for the seats in the auditoria, the designers analyzed the visitors' clothing. And to spare the musicians from looking at an empty hall on less busy days, they covered the seats in an irregular pattern of blue and green tones that gives the impression of a mixed audience. There is one seat in the large auditorium covered in yellow fabric, as though one lady has gone for a particularly bright dress today.

This playful approach is evident in numerous spots throughout the redesigned concert hall. For instance, the kitsch floral motifs on the coffee cups that van Eijk and van der Lubbe designed for in-house catering turn out on closer inspection to be collages of musical instruments.

With nine motifs and five colors, they have created a huge number of different designs so that even a regular guest at the concert hall is sure to get a different cup on each visit. It just goes to show: Even the tiniest detail can ensure a unique evening. The knotholes in the wooden "Silver Knot" tables in the foyers and artists' areas have not been covered over, but deliberately emphasized and filled with silver. The small mirrored tables and mirrored walls in the artists' dressing rooms make reference to the typical mirrors surrounded by light bulbs that we know from Hollywood movies.

The designer duo also developed a furniture system for the entire building. It features various shells and tops, from which armchairs and sofas are formed that allow more or less separation between users. Fitted with a hood, the armchair becomes the "Hood Chair", offering a degree of seclusion. The sofa, combined with the hood element, becomes a "Love Seat", which even features integrated lighting. For a music shop on the premises, the "Hood Chairs" become music stations complete with screens and speakers, where users can listen to pieces from the database.

According to the designers, the seating furniture does not formally reference music or sound – and yet its angular forms still seem to give the impression of a sharp-edged composition. For some it calls to mind, with its additional elements and bright colors, the loud Memphis design of the 1980s. With its presence and power, it can be considered an expression of a typical Dutch attitude to design. Indeed, in the Netherlands, especially in public spaces, designers often seek rather to demonstrate accessibility and democratic equality than pay too much attention to elegance, restraint and subtleties. Yet perhaps the furniture is just simply holding its ground as a capricious standalone for as long as possible, only to then meld into the orchestration of forms and colors in the end. With the Muziekgebouw in Eindhoven, Miriam van der Lubbe and Niels van Eijk have attempted to create a contemporary total artwork, where huge rooms and headstrong furniture, heterogeneous colors and fabrics, excellent acoustics and restrained optics fuse into a self-contained total acoustic experience. Including the high-pitched sound of a yellow seat.

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