

Press release

October 2008

Van Abbemuseum during
Dutch Design Week

Jan Slothouber

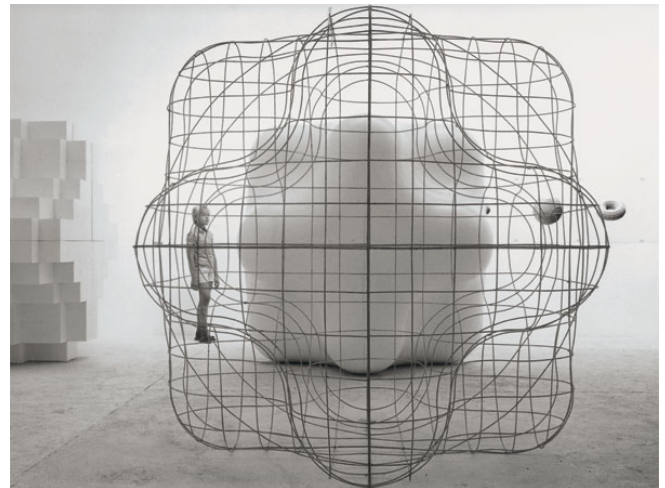
17/10/08 – 04/01/09

As part of the Dutch Design Week, the Van Abbemuseum devotes a retrospective exhibition to the diverse oeuvre of Jan Slothouber (1918–2007), from 17 October 2008 until 4 January 2009. Slothouber was an architect and emeritus professor at Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e). From 1950 to 1970, Slothouber collaborated with William Graatsma to develop a cube-based design system for the Dutch State Mines corporation (now DSM). After Slothouber died, the Van Abbemuseum acquired significant parts of his work, archives and library. This is all the more reason for placing this almost forgotten pioneer of postwar Dutch design in a contemporary spotlight.

Slothouber and Graatsma began working for DSM in the mid fifties. They designed packaging, advertisements and exhibitions, thereby establishing DSM's corporate image. They also experimented with cubic constructions, developing them for application in exhibition design such as the 1958 World Exhibition in Brussels. Their work was embraced by the art world in 1965 as an outcome of the incipient interest in serial and conceptual art as well as Minimal Art. Their innovative approach to commercial exhibition design earned them an exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Design, dimensions and experiments in colour and lettering, all in relation to the cube, were displayed under the title *Vier kanten: maat, vorm, kleur, letter* (Four Sides: Size, Shape, Colour, Letter). Slothouber and Graatsma went on to found the Centre for Cubic Constructions (CCC). In 1966, CCC won the Sikkens Prize, jointly with Peter Struycken and Johannes Itten, for their innovative contributions to art and design. Three years later, they represented the Netherlands with their Cubic Constructions at the 1970 Venice Biennale.

Cubes and CCC

In Jan Slothouber's view, the cube was not just a strictly-defined mathematical form and design principle, but it also had a social meaning. He was opposed to individualistic movements such as the painters of Cobra, and preferred a more 'democratic' artistic form; the cube was a universal form which everyone could



Designs by the Centre for Cubic Constructions at the Venice Biennial, 1970

comprehend and manipulate. CCC took this outlook to an extreme, taking no heed of copyrights on their own designs. Among other things they developed a universal frame consisting of twelve identical components which could be taken apart. The frame had a variety of applications and could be combined playfully with cubes of various sizes to assemble geometrical structures for uses such as furniture. This approach had a background in their socialistic ideals for integrating design and art into society.

Technische Hogeschool Eindhoven

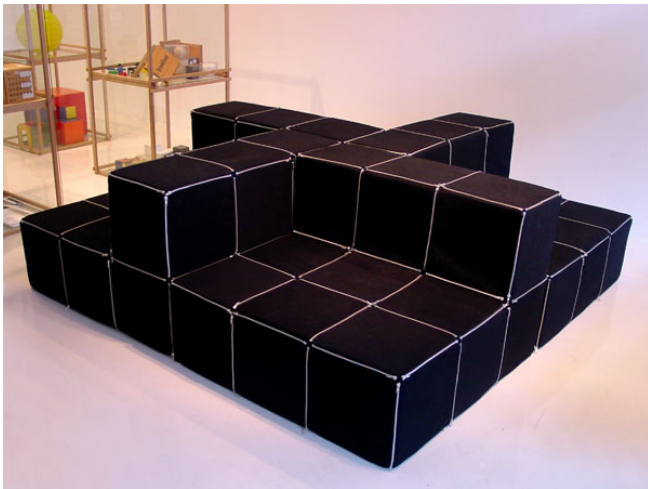
In 1970, Eindhoven's *Technische Hogeschool* (TH/e, forerunner of the present University of Technology) invited Jan Slothouber to set up a Faculty of Form Theory in the new architectural engineering department. Slothouber headed the Form Theory faculty first as Lector and later as a full Professor from 1970 until his retirement in 1983. Together with his students, he developed *nieuwe kubiese konstrukties* ('new cubic constructions'). He continued working on these after his academic retirement until his final years, earning widespread appreciation for his work, including an IKEA Award in 1989. His work has attracted new attention in recent years following an exhibition at the Vivid Gallery in Rotterdam. The revival of interest prompted the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam to purchase a number of his cubic constructions.

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Archives

The archives, library and several works of Jan Slothouber were recently donated to the Van Abbemuseum. This gift has made it possible for the museum to identify connections with the existing collection. For example, Slothouber's design methods and the associated philosophy bear strong resemblances to the way El Lissitzky created his many-sided oeuvre. Parallels may also be drawn with the researches of Minimalist artists such as Sol LeWitt in relation to standardization and systems. Moreover, Jan Slothouber was a friend and colleague of the Van Abbemuseum's former director Jan Leering. They collaborated at the Technical University of Eindhoven on several reports and philosophical essays on the social and cultural implications of design. Jan Slothouber was furthermore an admired teacher of the Eindhoven architect and artist John Körmeling. This influence is evident in the way Körmeling visualizes his concepts and in their similarity of outlook on the erasure of boundaries between design, architecture and art. The modular bench seat that Slothouber and Graatsma designed for the Pastoe company was used in the film *Mandarin Ducks* that Dutch artists De Rijke & De Rooy made for the Dutch Pavillion at the Venice Biennial 2005.



Modular bench seat, designed by Slothouber and Graatsma for Pastoe

Van Abbemuseum
Bilderdijklaan 10
Eindhoven

Opening hours
tuesday - sunday, 11.00 - 17.00
thursday, 11.00 - 21.00

Admission
adults: € 8,50
groups of 15 or more, visitors 65 and over: € 6
students and CJP card holders: € 4
thursday night: free admission (until 31/12/2008)

For more details visit www.vanabbemuseum.nl

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