

PRESS RELEASE

Nick van Woert

Violence

GEM, Museum of Contemporary Art

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Nick van Woert (b. 1979) scours convenience stores, waste containers and street corners in search of anything – whether cat litter, PVC or plastic – that he can use in his remarkable sculptures. Trained as an architect, the American artist is primarily interested in materials, their properties and uses, and their potential meanings. His works explore the meaning of ‘nature’ in today’s world. Starting from manmade objects – usually things generated by our throw-away society – Van Woert tries to recover what is natural about them. The resulting installations reconcile the artificial and the natural in an almost poetic way. The overwhelming power of nature, American history and contemporary culture are key focuses and Van Woert’s work is remarkably topical. The exhibition at the GEM is his first ever solo show at any museum in the Netherlands.

From Ancient Rome to the Unabomber, Nick van Woert ‘hijacks’ (as he puts it) items from the past and combines them with exaggeratedly artificial objects to produce his works. For example, he uses reproductions of classical sculptures – things he sees as ‘masquerading as sculpture’ – in his artistic dialogue and literally fills them with meaning. The results are an aesthetic delight. *Violence* spotlights the various themes within Nick van Woert’s oeuvre. Like the conflict that occurs when nature encounters a mass human presence, a theme strongly inspired by the artist’s origins. His surname may suggest a Dutch background, but Van Woert was actually born and brought up in Reno, Nevada (U.S.) – a city that abounds in contrasts, from the fascinating architecture of the casinos to the untamed landscapes of the surrounding desert.

Van Woert defines himself as a landscape painter. The relationship to painting is most obvious in his Perspex works *So Fresh So Clean* (2011) and *Erratic* (2012), where the colourful series of transparent boxes contain a range of materials such as cat litter, powder, hair gel and refuse. The painterly aspect recurs in his 2013 diptych and triptych, in which the colours bear a close resemblance to those of traditional paintings and the works hang on the wall, although the images are completely different: not trees, but garbage.

Alongside his fascination with Classical Antiquity and nature, the American artist also has a keen interest in American history and contemporary culture. This is exemplified by his impressive installation incorporating clothing once belonging to Ted Kaczynski (a.k.a. the Unabomber), and

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bought at auction by Van Woert. Kaczynski expressed his dissatisfaction with modern industrial society by committing dozens of bomb attacks from the 1970s onwards. Nick van Woert's first music LP, entitled *WACO*, reflects a similar preoccupation. The artist's reputation rests on his amazing, large-scale sculptures and sound is a completely new medium for him. Even so, he sees many similarities between the production of the LP and the way he sculpts his installations. In both cases, the important thing is the way the material is manipulated and the exterior is used to camouflage the reality beneath. The starting point for the album was a technique used by the FBI to try to dislodge the members of the Branch Davidian religious sect from their ranch in Waco. In an attempt to inflict sleep deprivation, the FBI bombarded them with atrocious high-volume noises and music. To create his recent LP, Nick van Woert re-recorded a selection of the music using other musicians. The result has been described as 'a thrilling maniacal ride' and *WACO* is now a collector's item. It can be heard at the GEM exhibition.

Nick van Woert studied architecture in Oregon and fine arts at Parsons School of Design in New York. His work has been exhibited since 2005. He lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. The exhibition at the GEM, Museum of Contemporary Art is his first ever museum solo in the Netherlands and only the second in the whole of Europe, following a major solo show at MAMbo in Bologna (Italy) in 2014.

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