

Aldo van Eyck

## Lucio Fontana apropos Joost van Roojen

1993



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(Unpublished text, dated 22 April 1993 and written on the occasion of  
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Since I wrote 'the Mirror Master' in 1967, 25 years have passed. In the meantime, after the 1969 retrospective in the Eindhoven Van Abbe Museum, silence has fallen around the pictorial activities of Joost van Roojen, although he has been continuously busy since then, making both aquarelles and murals. He collaborated with Bakema in Delft, with myself on the playground at the Amsterdam Zeedijk, and recently with Hertzberger, always with exceptional results.

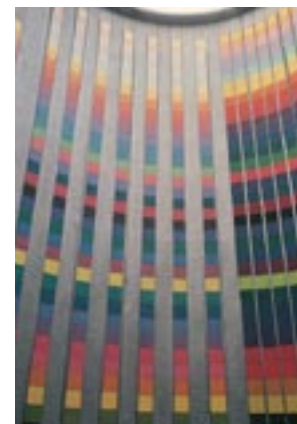
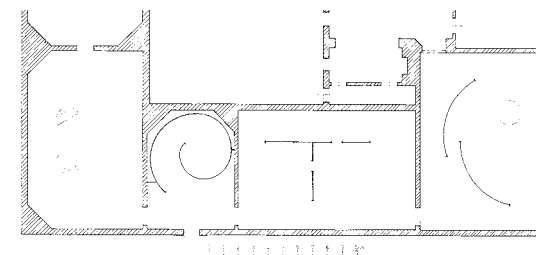
What I experience now when seeing his work of the past 10 years in the Municipal museum of the Hague confirms what I have written at the time. What Joost van Roojen made happen on paper, happens again, still always differently. His world only changes from within – at the inside. He discloses internal seasons and internal continents, both variously related and different. They are mainly other seasons and continents than those which are familiar to us but he brings them forward so that they simply become part of the latter. If that isn't a major contribution, then I think there are no other ones either.

As Heraclites said, one can never step twice into the same river. What is really new is also constant, because it has released itself from time – or coincides with it, which amounts to the same. In the work of Joost van Roojen space has escaped the palpable dimensionality of what is brought about on the white plane. Such a thing is actually a miracle medicine.

In the mid sixties I had a few illuminating discussions with Lucio Fontana, in Joost van Roojen's studio as well as at home. I mention this here, because both, Fontana and Joost van Roojen, activate flat virgin surface – its stubborn two dimensionality – by imparting a wonderful sense of space to where there was none before. On both occasions Fontana referred to Joost van Roojen with admiration. When the latter traces a line (or a double line N.B.!) on a white sheet of paper, enclosing forms or not, the untouched surface in between comes alive; it is rendered ambiguous;



A. van Eyck, Van Roojen exhibition design in the Eindhoven Van Abbe Museum, 1969



A. van Eyck, curved screen in Van Roojen exhibition, 1969



Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale 'Attese'*, 1959



Fontana's hand cutting the surface



*Concetto spaziale*, 1950



Fontana breaching the surface with hammer and chisel



Joost van Roojen

ambiguous as to what is passive and what is active: the lines, the coloured surfaces or what lies between them untouched. An Enigma is born. Space is drawn out of the surface or brought into it – both at the same time. There is no alternation – and no illusory effect, i.e. nothing is either in front or behind anything else. The surface is rendered gratifyingly transparent. Now when Fontana struck his surfaces, piercing them or slicing into them, their virgin two dimensionality is lifted into... space. Not because of the actual three dimensionality - plasticity – which ensues through the slits or holes in the first place, but, as with Joost van Roojen's lines and transparent coloured surfaces, the untouched ones in between are activated with the same precision and become spatial. That Lucio Fontana and Joost van Roojen should appreciate each others work did not surprise me at all. But what did was not so much that Fontana should have discovered 'another' *concetto spaziale* alongside his own in Joost van Roojen's work, but that he recognized in the latter somebody who – in his own words – had reintroduced landscape into the realm of painting – brought it back in an entirely new dimension. In this way paintings can again become landscapes – are in fact landscapes, sine qua non, as soon as they impart a sense of space within a flat surface. Thus concepts of space coincide with those about landscape – real ones – new ones, but not imaginary. Joost van Roojen, like Fontana (like Mondrian for that matter) bring about space the moment they touch a virgin surface. Therein lies the magic of their art. Both orchestrate varying degrees of density, so that their surfaces breathe – come alive: they are rendered transparent – indefinite by means of very precise definition.

If the art world had responded to Joost van Roojen's achievement the way Lucio Fontana did, it would have been the richer for it. It is what the semi-blind world of art does not 'see' which constitutes the true reality of art at any given time as much as what it does happen to see. There is art and 'other' art.