

FOREWORD

From an early age, I often accompanied my father into the city to browse galleries - a favourite haunt was Lemaire in the Leidsestraat - and he took us to many art exhibitions. He was a great talker, that father of mine, and I often heard, occasionally positively listened to him explaining why a particular object was so special and interesting to him. Through him, I've retained a certain way of seeing things. I grew up surrounded by the playgrounds, the orphanage, the schools in Nagele and the Sonsbeek pavilion, which my father designed. He did not really ask us how we experienced his designs, but he did observe us as we played and we were used as "models" for photo shoots and to test the buildings or playgrounds in practice. I am convinced my sense of distance, size, proportion and composition stems particularly from experiencing firsthand the playgrounds, which were spread all over Amsterdam, like a kind of parallel network, a children's infrastructure. So my understanding, such as it is, of my parents preoccupations stems from osmosis rather than being told about their interest in the objects that increasingly occupied our home. My childhood memories go back a long way, perhaps also because so many people visited our home, mainly artists. Constant, at whose place on the Henri Polaklaan I occasionally stayed and who, of course completely erroneously, I believed to be Spanish because of his sleek black hair and guitar playing, Karel Appel, with whom my brother and I would draw, sitting at the dining table, the result of one such session, drawn on a platted piece of sugar paper, I still have; Corneille, who often visited after another trip to Africa; the art historian Carola Giedion Welcker, CW we called her, wife of the architectural historian Siegfried Giedion; Nelly van Doesburg, who always brought us some delicious sweets from France; Carel Visser, with his thundering laugh; and later also the ever-smiling Alechinsky. I vividly remember my parents one afternoon sometime in the mid-1950s, came running upstairs with Tajiri and Ferdi, my father making a beeline for the seldom used radio, and without further ado the four of them wildly jiving on Elvis!

My parents were away a lot. When Aldo was invited abroad for a teaching session, a lecture or to receive one of the many honours bestowed on him over the years, Hannie followed later because we were at school, and we were put up with family, acquaintances, or at a summer camp. I realized at an early age that our family was different from that which I encountered at our playmates' houses.

Over time, my mother, Hannie, also started to buy objects, but, unlike my father, she chose the larger sculptures, figures that tended to gaze into "eternity." Aldo called the large objects "showpieces" which he wasn't particularly that interested in. Once those sculptures were placed somewhere, they stayed there. Not so the objects he himself had chosen, which were constantly moved,

rearranged into a new configuration, like a new member of the family and much like the playgrounds compositions.

They did though share an enthusiasm for one area of collecting: jewelry from distant areas. I can still hear my father remarking that he just did not understand why men are not supposed to wear jewelry.

Aldo considered the beauty of an object decisive in a potential purchase. For example, regarding a sculpture on which opinions differed, he remarked that if the object has its own aesthetic and is beautiful, it no longer matters who made it or when.

All those objects from all over the world and the paintings from the many artists with sometimes very opposing ideas did not feel as a collection; more as evidence of my father's search for the non-hierarchical, for what I have always understood as affinities, which reflected his interests and gave him inspiration.

He had great respect for the free way non-European cultures showed an amazing ability to play with numbers, intervals, patterns, rhythm, the way they managed form and counterform into equivalence, all aspects he practiced and sought solutions for in his own work.

Although he was obviously aware that the West produced some great art, he was vehemently opposed to the predominant and arrogant concept of 'Western Civilisation' to the exclusion of non-western cultures, often coined as 'primitive', the use of which word used to infuriate him and he himself shunned.

This month whilst the house was emptying, being cleared of its objects, has been quite sad for me and I think it will take some getting used to. It feels like my parents only now truly left with their cherished objects.

Tess van Eyck Wickham

