

THE HAGUE

Carel Visser

Museum Beelden aan Zee

Multiple trajectories coursed through “Carel Visser: Genesis,” curator Carel Blotkamp’s illuminating posthumous overview of Visser’s six-decade-long career. The survey demonstrated that Visser (1928–2015), one of the Netherlands’ most important 20th-century sculptors, was guided by a deep-seated need to make things, that he employed a remarkably diverse range of themes, materials, and techniques to actualize his ideas and observations, and that he rarely—if ever—acquiesced to artistic trends.

The breadth of Visser’s output, in fact, evades fac-

ile classification. Animals, for example, fascinated him, and he depicted them in many ways. Whereas the early and hellish *Stervend paard* (*Dying Horse*, 1949) materializes suffering with an intensity on a par with Picasso’s *Guernica*, the “Dubbelvorm” series (“Double form,” 1957–58)—inspired by mating birds—undertakes a fascinating exploration of mirrored abstract forms. Two impressive *Gorilla* works (1983 and 2006), on the other hand, reference the primate’s innate strength. These rugged wall-mounted compositions convey a spontaneity that derives

from Visser’s handling of cardboard. Though designated collages, they are very physical pieces that possess literal depth. Visser also models surrealistic figures, which embody humor and occasionally have a practical role. *Speedy Six* (1988) provides an outstanding example of the latter. Using horse hooves for the feet of a circular coat rack, Visser creates a conspicuous anomaly. One easily imagines the object surreptitiously tiptoeing around a room.

Visser’s attention was also captured by vegetation, landscape, architecture, and vehicles. In *Als een plant* (*As a plant*, 1988),

he converts cartoon-like contours of radiating leaves into a weighty visual statement. Torch-cut out of an iron slab approximately eight inches thick, the form, which is placed on a tree trunk segment, somehow manages to evoke a whole forest. *Lake Powell* (1988) employs the same method of fabrication. Based on a reservoir that straddles the Arizona-Utah border, this floor-based work fails to intimate a body of water; instead, its numerous frond-like branches, which at first recall *Als een plant*, reference the erosive power of the Colorado River, which over centuries created this unique topography.

Metal—cut, stacked, bent, folded, joined with rivets or by welding, and left outdoors to oxidize—clearly ranked as Visser’s favorite medium. The playful manner in which he approached the cube and ziggurat using thin, ribbon-like strips of metal firmly counterbalances the seriousness of much Minimalist sculpture. This is clear in the trio of squares that delineate the cube’s three axes in *Zonder titel* (*Untitled*, 1961). The inherent wit of this charmingly wobbly work reappears in *Gezakt* (*Collapsed*, 1971), a ziggurat that cannot support itself. Metallic colors also appear in compositions using other materials, specifically the leather *Liggend* (*Lying*,

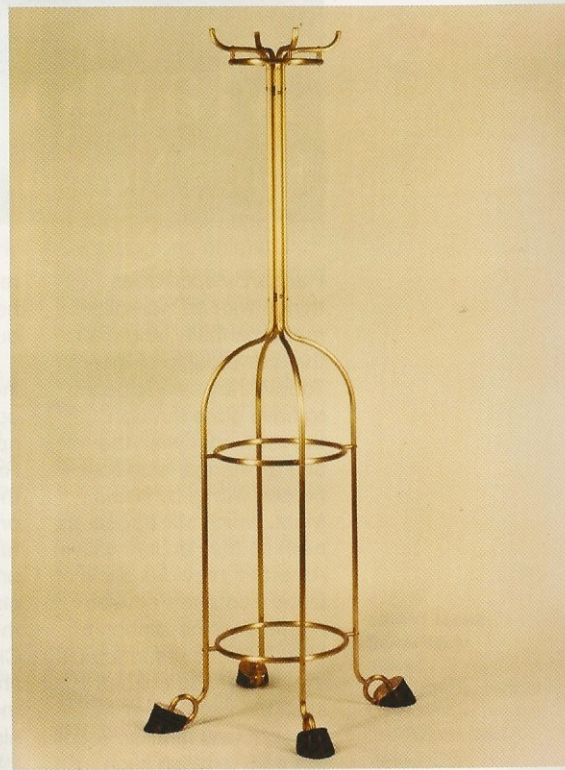
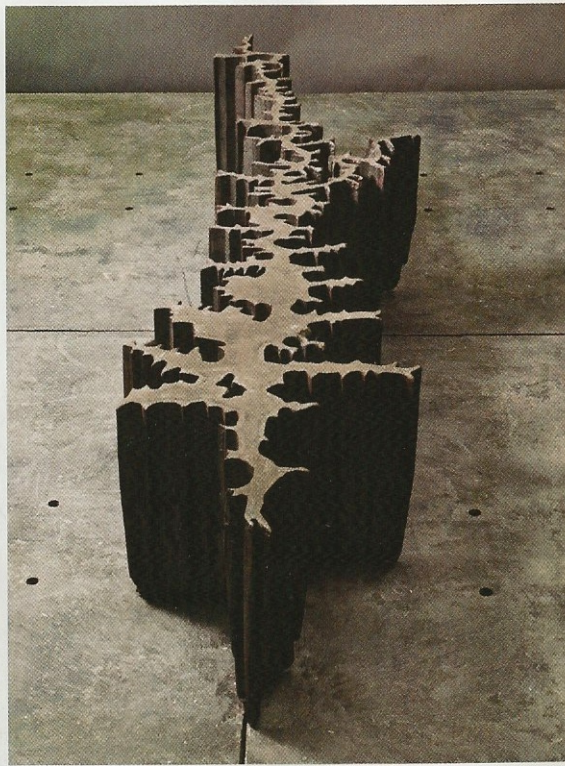
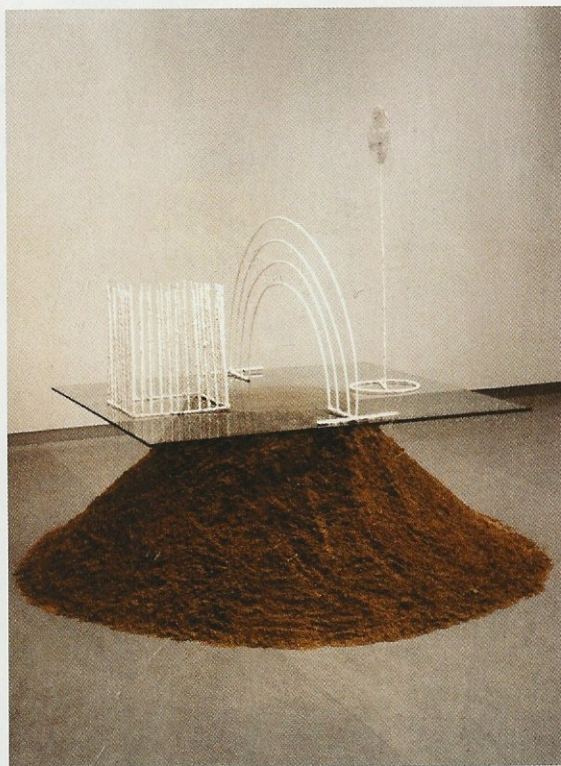
CAREL VISSER
*Stapelring/
gevouwen toren*
(*Stacking/
folded tower*),
1971.
Iron,
60 x 60 x 20 cm.



1975), *Dubbele trappira-
mide* (*Double step
pyramid*, 1948) in wood,
and a number of dense
graphite drawings.

In the film *The making
of Carel Visser: Gene-
sis*, Blotkamp notes the
curatorial challenge posed
by Visser's highly diverse
oeuvre. The exhibition title
refers to the first book of
the Bible, as well as to
Visser's religious upbringing.
Operating as an organiza-
zing principle, it follows
the sequence of what God
created and amends it with
the addition of an extra
category—made by man.
At the same time, it alludes
to Visser's disavowal of his
upbringing and equates the
idea of genesis with artistic
creation. Perhaps most
importantly, the concept of
the title served a pragmatic
function by helping viewers
to appreciate the various
thematic shifts taken by
Visser's work. The struc-
ture not only promoted the
associative qualities of his
output, but also empha-
sized its vivacity.

—JOHN GAYER



CLOCKWISE

FROM TOP LEFT:

***Regenboog* (Rainbow),
1980.**

Glass, iron wire, plaster,
and sand,
182 x 200 x 200 cm.

***Lake Powell*,
1988.**

Iron,
172 x 29 x 38 cm.

***Kledingstandaard*
(Clothing stand),
1988.**

Copper, brass, and
horse's hooves,
180 x 74 cm.

Installation view of
"Carel Visser: Genesis,"
2019.