


 Commitment ✓
 Closeness ✓
 Compatibility

Independent Singles

News | Opinion | Environment | Sport | Life & Style | Arts & Entertainment | Travel | Money | IndyBest | Student | Offers

UK ▾ | World ▾ | White House ▾ | Business ▾ | People ▾ | Science | Media ▾ | Education ▾ | Obituaries | Corrections | Weather

[Home](#) > [News](#) > [Obituaries](#)

Robert Jasper Grootveld: Artist and activist who helped found the Dutch Provos in the 1960s

Wednesday, 20 May 2009

 | | |

No single person can be said to have created the worldwide cultural phenomenon we call "the Sixties". But the Dutch anti-smoking "magician" and voodoo showman Robert Jasper Grootveld has a better claim than most. In the early Sixties, his surreal, dadaist "happenings" in Amsterdam electrified the city's bored youth and led to the creation of the playful Provo movement (short for "provocation"). With the charismatic, flamboyantly transvestite Grootveld as a spokesman, Provo was a catalyst for cultural revolution. The group provided free bicycles, subverted a royal wedding and humiliated the stiff-necked Dutch establishment and Amsterdam police force so effectively that both groups – and the country – underwent a near-total personality change. Provo lasted only from 1965 to 1967 but the spirit of what Grootveld dubbed "International Magic Centre Amsterdam" broke old Holland, inspired hippies in San Francisco and musicians and artists in London and paved the way, among other things, for the summer of love, Dutch total football and the green movement.

In 1960 the Netherlands had been a sleepy, isolated, puritan country, guilt-ridden and sombre. A decade later, it was a dynamic and liberal society. Early associate Jan Vrijman called Grootveld the "announcer of the international spirit of revolution".

Yet the former ice-cream salesman, window cleaner and shipyard worker who left school at 15 had no agenda and was apolitical. Grootveld's only desire, he said, was for personal publicity. He first attracted attention in 1955, floating through Amsterdam on a tiny raft like some ship-wrecked sailor, mocking diners in fancy restaurants. In 1961 he defaced cigarette advertisements with the letter K (for cancer), was arrested, and a new career beckoned. Soon he was drawing crowds to the Spui square and spreading mysterious graffiti, including the slogan "Klaas is Coming!" (inspired by his belief that Sinterklaas – Father Christmas – was the messiah).

Grootveld's war against boredom and the consumer society switched to his anti-smoking "K-Temple", an old garage near the Leidseplein where he performed shamanistic anti-smoking rituals while a crowd chanted "Bram bram! ugga ugga!". Regulars included a writer called Johnny the Selfkicker, who talked himself into a trance and threw himself from high places, and a "half doctor" (a failed medical student) who tried to achieve a state of higher consciousness by drilling a hole in his forehead. When Grootveld tired of this, he set fire to the temple and danced on the roof as it burned.

Writers and artists adored Grootveld for his wild invention and for doing things they never dared. But apart from a two-year love affair with the writer Gerard Reve, Grootveld, son of a west Amsterdam carpenter, was wary of intellectuals. His experience of hunger and poverty during the Nazi occupation also set him apart from younger, ideologically driven Provo leaders like the anarchists Rob Stolk and Roel van Duyn. While they sought violent confrontation with the police, Grootveld, whose grandfather had been a policeman, steered the group instead towards a far more original and influential strategy of playful, witty, non-violence.

In 1967, Grootveld moved to the margins of the counter-culture where he gave away marijuana but railed against hard drugs. Over the next 40 years he became forgotten, spending much of his time in Amsterdam's former docklands, creating floating gardens out of chunks of polystyrene. Seeing no contradiction with his anti-tobacco activism, he also smoked heavily and became alcoholic. Increasingly severe mood swings, caused, he said, by bipolar disorder, led to him falling out with most of his old friends.

He never really recovered after his wife Thea, an assistant TV producer, left him in 2000 (she died in 2005). But friendship with a young writer, Eric Duivenvoorden, brought one last moment in the limelight. Ten days before his death from lung disease, Grootveld attended the launch of Duivenvoorden's biography of him, *Magiër van een nieuwe tijd* ("Magician of a New Time") and spent the evening beaming, smoking – and shouting at anyone who dared sit beside him on a throne left vacant for Sinterklaas.

David Winner

Robert Jasper Grootveld, artist and activist: born Amsterdam 19 July 1932; married 1972 Thea Keizer (marriage dissolved 2000; one daughter); died Amsterdam 26 February 2009.

SPONSORED LINKS:

Ads by Google

Ben je tussen 19-26 jr?

 Wil je een spannend leven? Test jezelf en word luchtverkeersleider!
www.luchtverkeersleider.nl

Dutch Lessons Amsterdam

 Every month new courses.2 locations. Sharp prices
www.katakura-wblc.nl/

Perfectclinic® Laser €25

 Snel van je ongewenste haartjes af. Permanent ontharen met Diode-laser.
www.Perfectclinic.nl/ontharen

Post a Comment

Subject:

Message:

Offensive or abusive comments will be removed and your IP logged and may be used to prevent further submission. In submitting a comment to the site, you agree to be bound by the [Independent Minds Terms of Service](#).

 |

Copyright 2009 Independent News and Media Limited

Also in this section

- [Lives Remembered: Edward Cooke](#)
- [Salamo Arouch: Boxer who stayed alive in Auschwitz by fighting 200 exhibition bouts for Nazi officers](#)
- [Nicholas Maw: Composer whose modernism was underpinned by his lyricism and Romantic leanings](#)
- [Hubert Van Es: Photographer who took one of the best-known images of the Vietnam War](#)

EDITOR'S CHOICE


Cannes 2009: the highs and lows

Avoiding a bank holiday nightmare

Mass sacking of Hollywood agents

Nick Clegg: Rebel with a cause


Ads by Google

Ben je tussen 19-26 jr?

 Wil je een spannend leven? Test jezelf en word luchtverkeersleider!
www.luchtverkeersleider.nl

Perfectclinic® Laser €25

 Snel van je ongewenste haartjes af. Permanent ontharen met Diode-laser.
www.Perfectclinic.nl/ontharen

Dutch Nanny & Au Pair

 Save money on Nannies in Holland. File for your Childcare Allowance!
www.blueumbrella.nl/allowance

"25 Pounds in 2 Weeks"

 Amazing African Weight-Loss Secret. As Seen on CNN & Dr. Oz.
www.AppliedNutritionalResearch.com

Most €150k+ Jobs

 Executive Career Service in Europe Network with over 4.500 Headhunters
www.Experteer.com

PROMOTIONS



Visit Scotland

Delicious food & drink, art & culture, wildlife & nature

- > Visit Scotland
- > Discover Tirol
- > Festival tickets
- > Cliff diving
- > Fantasy Football for Schools
- > Visit Languedoc
- > How to be

ON THIS SITE

- > Dating
- > Independent Offers

SPONSORED LINKS:

Ads by Google

[Art Collectors](#)
[Hem Amsterdam](#)
[Dutch Art](#)
[Art Projects](#)

Most viewed

Read	Emailed
1	Exclusive: The unseen photographs that throw new light on the First World War
2	Manchester United: potential transfer list
3	The acid test: World's weirdest experiments
4	The Ten Best Sex Toys
5	The 50 Best Beachwear
6	Brown calls Blair in to No 10 for secret talks as crisis mounts
7	Newcastle United relegated after defeat by Villa
8	The Ten Best Managers in British Football
9	100 things to do before you die
10	Mexico captures 'most-wanted' drug suspect