



Still from *Guantánamo Baywatch, Part 2* 2007 video transferred to DVD (color, sound); 24 minutes Collaboration with Core van der Hoeven

Born in the Netherlands, 1968. Lives and works in Rotterdam.

As engaged as a postmodern moral philosopher with pragmatic issues of consensus and as embarrassingly funny as a slapstick comedian, Erik van Lieshout works in various mediums to present vulnerable encounters in which he and his audience confront the foreign or the forbidden. These meetings are imbued with risks, fears, and instabilities, bringing us to the edge of possibility and change. In recent projects, he entered communities of Ghanaian rappers, the nouveau riche, Moroccan immigrants, and a psychiatric hospital to record documentary-like social satires. Although the interactions are unscripted, certain personal and social issues recur throughout the films: tensions caused by immigration, the rise of right-wing nationalism, sexual exploration, and capitalist hypocrisies. These are hot-button issues in the artist's homeland, and their analysis drives his work: "Sometimes . . . it is better to look at subjects . . . as they relate to oneself first, before saying anything about other people. That is why I appear so frequently in my films."¹

Van Lieshout's distinctive artistic practice, which combines artwork in two, three, and four dimensions, came together in the late 1990s when he began making interactive environments from salvaged building materials. In 1999, he made the video installation *EMMDM*, a play on the white emulation of hip-hop fashion and violence. To view it, visitors were required to crouch inside a cardboard box in which the

video was projected. Since that time, van Lieshout has followed in the tradition of Dan Graham and Hélio Oiticica in designing expanded cinemas that physically engage viewers with installations and moving images. By displaying his videos in an architecture that forces visitors to move around other people in order to see the small projections or monitors, he encourages the viewer to undertake, on a small scale, the kind of social negotiations that he challenges himself with in his projects. The artist's functional structures are built on the physicality and frank immediacy of the drawings and paintings he has been making since his graduation from Ateliers '63, Haarlem, in 1992. Using the visual language of pornography and advertising, his works on paper now introduce the concepts behind each installation, record the brainstorming sessions for his videos, and provide a means to work through their inevitable emotional aftermath.

For this exhibition, the artist debuts the third section of his latest trilogy, *Guantánamo Baywatch* (2007), made in collaboration with his friend and video editor Core van der Hoeven, which explores the idea of America as an almost alien culture. Part 1 was made in Los Angeles; Part 2 was shot in New Mexico; and Part 3 of the trilogy was completed in Israel. As with earlier works, this series mixes the brutal honesty of first-person documentaries with the rhythm of MTV-style editing and music, a combination that has led many to compare his videos to reality television. But although they

may be stylish, his broken narratives nonetheless resist neat packaging and surpass clichés. The artist has said that he left Europe for the United States in order to find the war in Iraq, and certain allusions to that conflict keep popping up in these three videos.² However, the troubling implications of war are not overt. Van Lieshout entertains us, but at the same time, the psychic residue he stirs up disturbs: "People ought to be overwhelmed by my work, and confused, because it is cheerful, intimate, and yet somber; they can then enjoy the latent humor. Nonetheless something should linger so that they can head straight for the pub to drink away the uncomfortable associations."³

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1. Rein Wolfs and Miriam Varadinis, "Cut the Performance in the Edit," in *This Can't Go On (Stay with Me)*, exh. cat., Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Kunsthaus Zürich; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2006), 74–75.

2. Erik van Lieshout, interview with Ali Subotnick, in "Hammer Projects: *Eric van Lieshout*," <http://www.hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/126/>.

3. Kees Twist, et al., *Erik van Lieshout: Naughty by Nature, not because I hate you . . .*, exh. cat. (Groningen, the Netherlands: Groninger Museum; Rotterdam: NAI Uitgevers, 2002), 85.