

PIET KILLAARS



100 JAAR



ENGLISH



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Piet Killaars 100 years

Piet Killaars (1922, Tegelen – 2015, Maastricht) was an exceptionally talented sculptor and had a prominent artistic career in Limburg. He is best known by the Dutch public for his monumental sculptures in public spaces. His idiom is characterised by an abstract and symbolic representation of growth processes that express both power and vulnerability at the same time.

Piet Killaars 100 years presents an overview of sculptures and preliminary sketches from the Bonnefanten collection. Some of the preliminary sketches were a gift to the museum from Killaars' heirs. The earliest work dates from 1955. Together, they give an impression of a virtuoso sculptor and skilled craftsman, who continually drew inspiration from nature in lending a spiritual dimension to his work.

Piet Killaars taught at the Academy in Tilburg (1967-1970) and at the Academy in Maastricht (1970-1986). He was a member of the Council for Culture (1962-1968) and of the National Advisory Committee for Sculpture. He was awarded the Order of the Netherlands Lion and was an honorary citizen of the city of Maastricht.

Studies and inspiration

In 1939, Piet Killaars entered employment with the local ceramics company Russel-Tiglia, which was starting up a new department of applied art. Artists from Limburg, like Charles Eyck (1897-1983) and Suzanne Nicolas (1897-1985), created their ceramic works there, with technical support from Killaars. Meanwhile, the young Killaars took classes in drawing and sculpture in Venlo and Tegelen, and left for Maastricht in 1941. There, he continued his studies with the well-known sculptor and ceramicist Charles Vos (1888-1954), earning a living by working at a ceramics studio in Maastricht. Between 1943 and 1944, he went into hiding.

After the liberation, Killaars travelled a lot and worked with several sculptors in the Netherlands and Belgium. On a study trip to France, he was impressed by the work of progressive sculptors like Germaine Richier (1902-1959) and Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966). These artists were associated with existentialism, a movement that revolves around the desolate loneliness of people left to their own devices. This was a reaction to World War II, which left its mark on everyone, including Killaars. He continued his studies at the Jan van Eyck Academy with Oscar Jespers (1887-1970). Jespers was internationally renowned, and as a skilled stone carver had a great influence on the young Killaars.

Monumental commissions

Killaars soon made a name for himself and held exhibitions in the Netherlands and abroad. The emphasis of his work, however, lay on the many monumental commissions he received for the public space in Limburg and elsewhere in the Netherlands. Smaller-scale works are included in the collections of: the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp; Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden; Centraal Museum, Utrecht,

and Museum van Bommel van Dam, Venlo, as well as in various private collections in the Netherlands and abroad.

Figurative geometry

Killaars' oeuvre reveals an artist in search of an idiom that relates to the greater contexts in art and outside it. The work underwent a long development, through figuration to abstraction, based on observations of the forces and effects of organic growth in nature. Also in his later, more abstract works, the traces of his original source of inspiration – nature – remain visible.



Piet Killaars, *Vaandeldragers*, 1955, ceramic chamotte, 50 x 40 x 35 cm. Collection Bonnefanten. Photo: Peter Cox.



Piet Killaars, *Koraal*, 1968 – 1970, aluminium and granite, 66 cm (h).
Collection Bonnefanten. Photo: Peter Cox.

Killaars himself characterised his later work as 'figurative geometry'; a tribute to laws of nature that may not be mathematically ascertainable, but whose existence he did not doubt. This is expressed in his work in rhythmic repetitions, which could carry on infinitely. For his sculptures, he uses various materials, such as marble, bronze, terracotta, stone, travertine, stainless steel, aluminium, granite, bamboo and wood.

Studio practice

The series of medium-sized preliminary sketches and the big display cabinet with many small-scale sketches come directly from Killaars' studio. Together, they give a good idea of Killaars' daily practice, directly showing the artist's hand and providing insight into his working process and body of ideas.

The artist's daughter, Fransje Killaars, says that he arranged his sketches in the display cabinet according to a very precise system. Although that system is not immediately obvious, as a unique artists' archive it invites and contributes to further research into Killaars' oeuvre and times.

The series of small sculptures and a few models are preliminary studies for large monumental works in the public space. They are mostly made in simple, easily worked materials, such as plaster and wood. Here, we see the virtuoso hand of Killaars at work, allowing the material to speak for itself in the development of a sculpture.



Left: Piet Killaars, *Doorgang, Poort en Boot*, 1980, oak and iron, 300 x 60 x 290 cm.
Collection Bonnefanten. Photo: Roy Villevoeye.

Top: Piet Killaars, *Vormstudie*, 1930 - 2000, paper and ink, 50 x 75 cm. Collection Bonnefanten. Photo: Peter Cox.

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Cover image: Piet Killaars, *Cirkelende beweging*, 1978, bronze, 99,5 x 75 x 92 cm. Collection Bonnefanten. Photo: Peter Cox.

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