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From the Netherlands, With Attitude

Art Review

By GRACE GLUECK

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NORTH ADAMS, Mass. — The Dutch painter and video artist Erik van Lieshout may not be the world's biggest kvetch, but he could be a runner-up. In three up-close-and-personal videos at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, "Part 1," "Part 2" and "Up!" (as well as a short fourth, "Lariam," that is much more focused), Mr. van Lieshout whines, cries and wallows in hypochondria, parading his boorish self-obsession before his mother, his shrink and his editor friend Core, whom he taunts and bullies.

And yet your annoyance at him is tempered gradually by the growing realization that at times he behaves just like you, or even me. He's certainly the least predictable of the three visual artists from the Netherlands (the other two are Fransje Killaars and Dré Wapenaar) now showing at Mass MoCA. Their work is part of the museum's participation in "NL: A Season of Dutch Arts in the Berkshires," a festival coordinated by Dutch public and private agencies that also includes dance, theater, cinema and live music performances at Mass MoCA, the Clark Art Institute, Jacob's Pillow, Tanglewood and elsewhere.

Mr. Lieshout, who was born in 1968 and is well known in Europe (he participated in the 2003 Venice Biennale and was given a major survey in 2006 by the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam), started out as a raw Expressionist-style painter but is better known now for his rough-edged, confessional videos, done in home-movie style. (Several of his recent large-scale drawings, dealing mainly with his dizzying impressions of America, are also being shown.) In "Up!" (2005) his discourse, with English subtitles, rambles from a no-holds-barred account (to his analyst) of a sexual encounter with a male stranger in a shop, to his fear of strong women, to his rages at his domineering mother, to whom he refers with an obscenity.

At one point, talking to his analyst, he cries while describing how he and his brother painted the coffin of their father, "who never approved of me until I became famous."

"Part 1" and "Part 2" (2007) form a film collage of his travels in the American West with his friend and film editor Core van der Hoeven. The work was sponsored by the Hammer Museum of Los Angeles, where Mr. van Lieshout was an artist in residence earlier this year.

The two men burn up the highways at dangerous speeds on visits to Hollywood, Las Vegas and the New Mexico desert. En route they schmooze and spar about how badly they treat each other, track down "star homes" like Julia Roberts's ranch, join a bunch of guys in a hot tub and take a skiing lesson. They also squabble over how to photograph the striking scenery and sunsets (projected into the movie at odd moments, the photographs seem like old-master Dutch paintings), hone their depression and fear of illness, discuss the folly of the war in Iraq and

watch a group of machos at target practice. "I hate it here, I hate it here," Mr. van Lieshout says at one point.

What's interesting about these films is their craftily unedited stream of consciousness, their thrust to let it all hang out so that the artist seems to surrender control almost completely to the camera. That they work at all is due to Mr. van Lieshout's relentlessly aggressive personality, which keeps the viewer on edge.

In an earlier and much more focused short film, "Lariam" (2001), he takes a different tack, visiting Ghana to study with a master rapper. There, under the master's tutelage, he creates a rap chant from the instructional material for Lariam, the antimalarial medication he took before leaving home, and teaches it to the enthusiastic children of the village (none of whose families, presumably, could afford the drug). Well, it's one approach to foreign aid.

That film is being screened outdoors on the museum grounds in a shack put together by Mr. van Lieshout from packing cases, with an interior meant to suggest the rude quarters of slave ships exporting their cargo to the civilized world.

In contrast the work of Fransje Killaars and Dré Wapenaar, commissioned by the museum, deals with those old art standbys color, pattern and shape. In her "Installation: Figures, Colors First," Ms. Killaars, 48, who also began her career as a painter, expresses her fascination with the scintillating hues of India. She has lined a gallery corridor on the ground floor with bright strips of wallpaper, which serve as background for a group of mysterious figures, really mannequins, with brilliantly colored and patterned textiles of her invention thrown over them like burkas. Completely covered by the fabrics, the mannequins make a haunting procession down the corridor, a seraglio mysteriously paying a visit to a New England factory.

Mr. Wapenaar's contribution is architectural. A sculptor known for his inventive use of tents (his "birthing tent" and one meant to serve as an encampment for the dead were previously shown at Mass MoCA), Mr. Wapenaar, 46, has designed a pavilion for the museum's central courtyard where performances, films and special events take place.

His "ceiling" over new redwood decking is a complex arrangement of shaped canvases playing off the old brick and I-beams of the museum's original factory structure. He deliberately exposed an oil tank on the north wall by cutting through existing masonry and painted it a bright orange.

The area has become an inviting space that extends the museum's reach out of doors. Don't be a stranger, it seems to say.