WILLEM KRIJGSMAN

The Play of EMOTION *and* FANTASY

PAPER COLLAGES
ASSEMBLAGES
JUNK ART
DRAWINGS
CLAY SCULPTURE

THE PLAY OF EMOTION AND FANTASY

Cover: 'Optimist', 1992, assemblage,
in private collection,
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ASSEMBLAGES
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AN INTERVIEW

by

Lesley Trash

part one

An interview with Willem Krijgsman by Lesley Trash

The Play of Emotion and Fantasy

The first time I came in contact with the art of the Visual Artist Willem Krijgsman, living in Finland, was on the website of the Artists' Association of Finland. I am an art historian and a senior editor of the English art magazine ***Behind Art***. We are searching worldwide for interesting art and the story behind the art. If we find something very interesting, we try to contact the artist and ask if he or she is willing to cooperate with us. We offer an interview and a review of the artist's art in text and pictures in our magazine.

Back to Willem Krijgsman's art. On his website pages of the Artists' Association, he was showing a large collection of small objects made out of all kinds of items like: kitsch, junk, toys and waste. We immediately were interested, because these objects were so full of humour and fantasy. We agreed to make an interview with him at his atelier in the centre of Helsinki. It was a very interesting meeting, in which Willem was showing many more objects and interesting stories behind them. There were also funny and dramatic drawings from the objects he had made and a very exciting large collection of collages made out of torn magazines. Besides, his workspace was full of 'colour pencil paintings', as he called them, intertextual collages, he explained. But here is the interview in its full length.

LT: is Lesley Trash
WK: is Willem Krijgsman

LT: Your atelier is full of wonderful, different types of art: I see sculptural objects, paper collages, trash sculptures or assemblages, bas-reliefs, colour pencil drawings etc. Are you in a way searching for an artistic direction?

WK: Thank you for appreciating my art, Miss Trash.

LT: Yes, I really do and, please, call me Less.

WK: Yes, you can say, I explore many ways of making art. Or in my art there has been many different forms of expressions. You can find drawings, oil paintings, sculptures in low or high relief and objects. In the middle of the eighties, I was making abstract drawings with oil crayons in primitive way. I was also making collages out of torn magazines and forming relief sculptures and bigger objects out of trash, that I found anywhere. Later on, I created smaller objects out of junk, toys and kitsch. In the nineties my collage art, as I call it, became more connected with drawing and later on I concentrated mainly on drawing. I was referring more and more to the history of art, by that, expressing feelings and emotions in dramatic, melodramatic or humorous ways. You find that also in my assemblages and objects.
Now, in the beginning of 2000, I am drawing intertextual collages using Finish and Dutch, so called Golden Age paintings, in which I show my integration process into the Finish society.

Back to your question, I am just exploring different ways of making art. During some period, I'm involved in one medium and then it develops into a new one. For me, making art is like a journey through different types of art forms. All the different art forms, I have used, are serious periods of expression and they develop on into a new direction. In that way, I have been developing as a visual artist. I do not search consciously for an artistic direction. But maybe it is unconsciously searching for the right medium, with which I express myself the best.

LT: Why did you stop making abstract art?

WK: Well, I really liked making abstract art, but at the end, it felt like doing decorative art. Only the colours, lines and structures of the composition made it work. It was a bit like making interior design. I felt, that I wanted to create stories with my works, not only decorations. So, I just started to do something different by making paper collages, tearing interesting parts out of magazines. From these torn pieces I made pictures by gluing them in certain ways on paper. Before I noticed, they started looking like three-dimensional objects. The paper collages activated my fantasy and I imagined funny names. I really enjoyed doing it.

LT: What about your assemblages?

WK: Assemblages I had made already before I knew, what I was doing. As a young kid, I was making objects out of things people threw away. I was growing up in the fifties and sixties in the very cultural town of Delft. Between my home street and the next street, there was a piece of old farmer land. We children used to play there. People were throwing all kinds of small trash on the land. I collected items from the trash and with my fantasy I made funny objects out of them. At home we had a coal stove and we used wood to get it on. My father made small firewood for that purpose, and I was collecting pieces of wood and blocks from that heap. From these pieces I was building fantasy-houses, castles and whatever buildings. I didn't need Lego. So, as quite young, I was making already collages.

LT: Did you have any support or were you influenced by somebody then?

WK: No, I don't think so. I was the youngest in the working-class family of six children. My parents were always busy with their own tasks, my father with his work and my mother with her householding. My three sisters and two brothers were far too old for playing with me. They were concentrating on their own things. My youngest sister was seven years older than me and youngest brother thirteen years older. So quite an age difference, also, with all other relatives. It created a natural distance between me and them all, a kind of space. That gave me peace and freedom. Because I was often playing alone at home, I could develop my fantasy world. Besides, I am a loner by heart, shy and not very socially focused. I do well on my own.

LT: How did you choose certain items?

WK: As a young boy I was especially interested in technical items, like for example parts of bicycles or small machine parts. It was a bit like playing with a Meccano box. Do you know Meccano?

LT: Yes, my older brother used to have a box of Meccano and I was sometimes secretly playing with it. I was always more interested in his toys than mine.

WK: Who was singing 'Girls will be boys and boys will be girls…'? Anyway, I remember, that my earliest assemblages had boyish symbols.

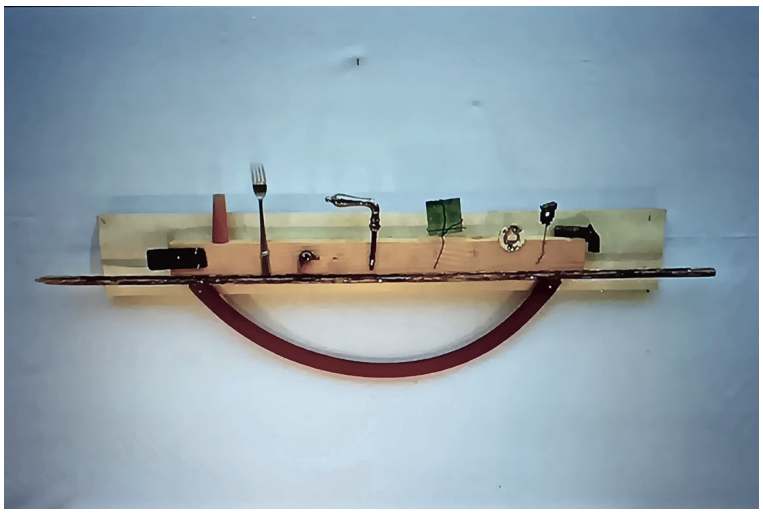
LT: The Kinks in *Lola*, isn't it? What do you mean by boyish symbols?

WK: I could build, for example, a fantastic sword, that gave me a feeling of power or a magical robot, that somehow protected me. These kinds of symbols, I mean.

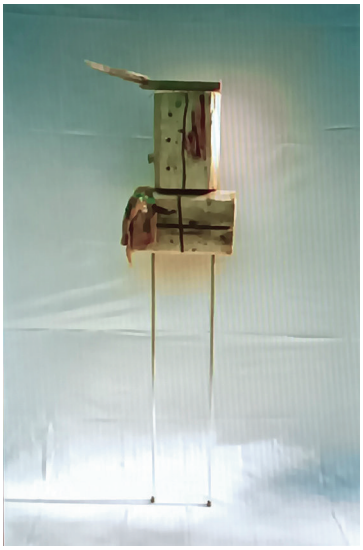
LT: Did you make also later assemblages in the same way, symbolically?

Catman, 1990

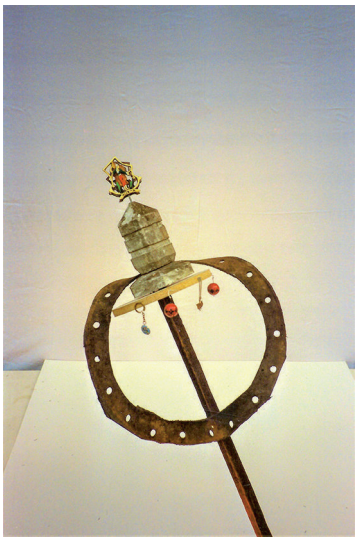
Reconstruction, 1990



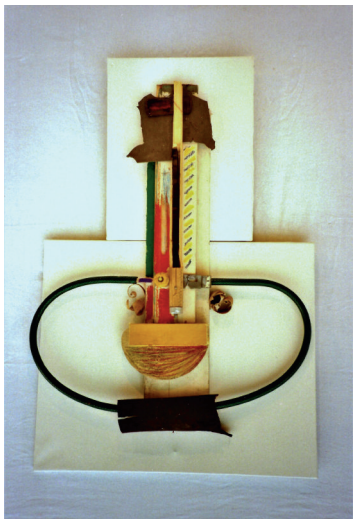
Household, 1990



Ole, Toreador! 1990



Water-Knight, 1990



Connected, 1990

WK: Well, I am a symbolist by heart with everything I do in my art. I want to symbolize a certain feeling. In the beginning of the nineteen-nineties I was making assemblages out of building-material. My wife and I had bought an old wooden house with a partly rotten floor. Later on, we found more rotting parts in the house. Of course, we didn't know it at the time. But it caused us a lot of trouble and we had to renovate the house completely. Later on, I made a series of assemblages from the renovation disposed material. With these series I somehow was dealing with my disappointment of buying such a house in bad condition. It also symbolised the renovation process.

LT: Are you still having these assemblages to show?

WK: I do not have those anymore. I have exhibited them, in 1990, in an art gallery in Helsinki arear. They didn't sell, so, at the end they were demolished. I can show you pictures of them.

LT: Oh, they look fantastic! Pity, that they are gone. Why couldn't you save them?

WK: With this old wooden house, there was also a shed, which I used as a storage space. These works were kept there for some years and started to get bad. When we moved to our nowadays home, they were thrown away. Luckily, I had made pictures of them, so I can reminisce, when I need to.

LT: They are so full of fantasy. Take this for example, the name *Toyota for Picasso,* is so funny and in my opinion, it completely covers the image of the assemblage. I immediately see, what it means. What made you put the pieces together like they are in the picture?

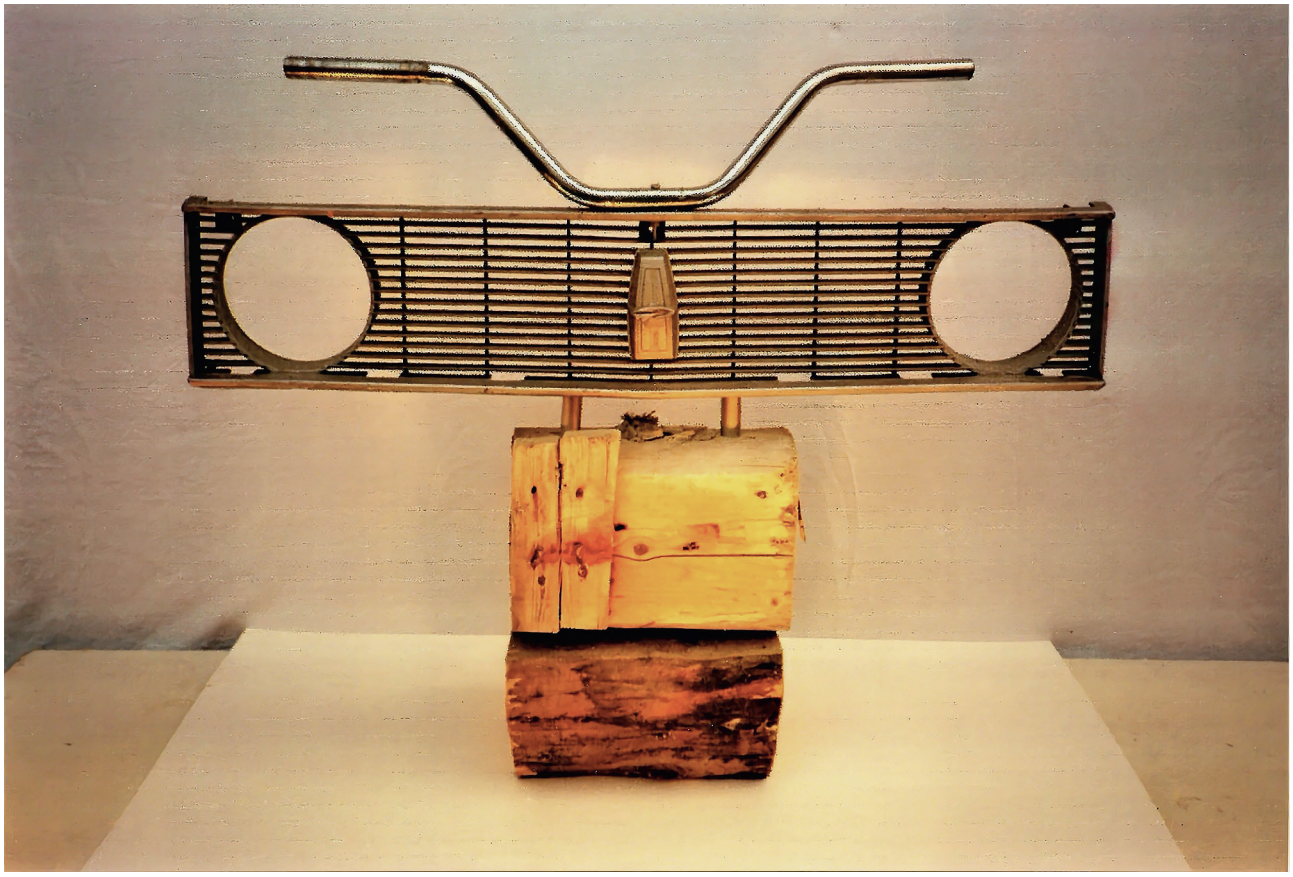
WK: I am a fan of Picasso's sculpture and assemblages. I have seen them with my wife in the Picasso Museum, in Paris, was it 1991? Really fantastic works. Somehow, I was making my own version of Picasso's *Bull's Head* – wait, I'll show you. Here it is: *Bull's Head, 1942*. A seat and handlebars from a found bicycle, brilliant idea. My version is based on the same method of collecting found things and joining them together, with fantasy, into a new object. I found the Toyota grill and the handlebars of a bicycle and put them together with an old wooden part of beam left from the renovation of our house. Joined together, I referred to Picasso's *Bull's Head* in my own way.

LT: Very interesting. So, in this way, an early example of your collages. In this case, your fantasy connects art history with your own life history as you do in your intertextual drawings.

WK: Well, that's true. In all my assemblages, I'll show you now, there are connections to art history, because I am influenced by the history of assemblage art. In my academic years, in Rotterdam, we students were often taken to the nearby museum, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, where there was a good collection of modern art, as well as collages. Besides, we also had to make all kinds of collages, as rehearsals, to learn proportions in compositions and proportions in colour and space.

LT: By which assemblage artists were you influenced?

WK: When I started to make assemblages and collages during the eighties, I began searching and buying art books about assemblages and collages in general. I remember for example, that I found a book of the American and French artist Arman. I was really taken by his art. His way of *creation via destruction* was a real eyeopener. And his *Accumulations*, as he called them: stacked objects like violins or whatever. Some were casted in metal and welted together as a new sculptural concept. They were such a revelation for me. That inspired me.



Toyota for Picasso, 1990

Then, there was the German Dadaist Kurt Schwitters, whom I liked. He was well-known for his collages, called *Merz Pictures.* His works I had learned to know already during my academic years. What I also liked, was his interior art, called *The Merzbau.* A built-in, abstract, with fantasy composed interior, like a collage, filled with found objects. And then, there was Robert Rauschenberg, a well-known American painter and graphic artist.
At photography lessons, during my studying time, we had to make photographic collages á la Man Ray, in black and white. That was very interesting.
I also felt inspired by the well-known Finnish sculptor Mauno Hartman. He made fantastic big wooden constructions and abstract sculpture out of old wooden logs, from old houses. I also admired his collages on canvas and paper. So, you see, enough influences after all.

LT: I have noticed. That's why they all have that certain quality in composition.

WK: It feels, as if, I made them just like that, but of course, there is knowledge behind them. Before making this series of assemblages, I had made in 1989 a series of paper collages, I'll show you later.

LT: What is the story behind this one, named *Catman* (page 11) in the photograph?

WK: Well, opposite our house, there lived a man, alone. His house was surrounded by forest, so we couldn't see it. But on his land, he kept a lot of cats. We used to call him the 'Catman'. I made the assemblage and gave it the nickname *Catman.*

LT: Funny story. What about this piece called *Water-Knight?* (Page 11).

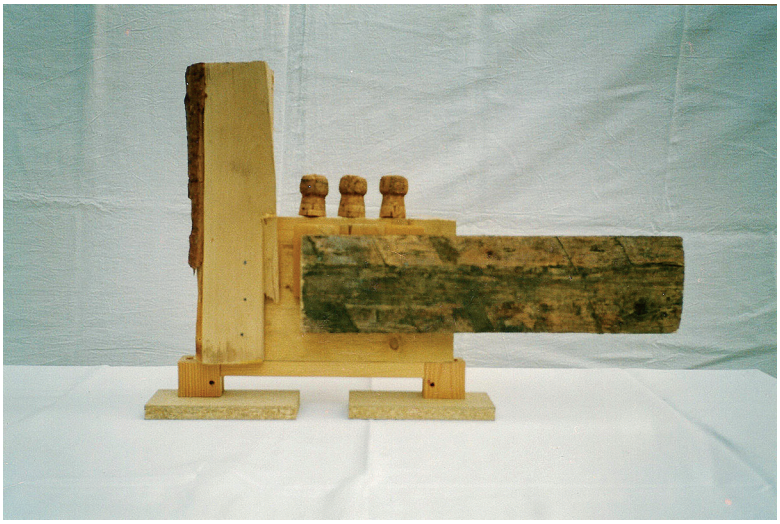
WK: Again, an example of reflecting the renovation of our house and the troubles we faced living in that old house. I found a gasket in the garden and used it in the assemblage *Water-Knight.*
We also had a water well with an old wooden hood on it. Before we were connected with the public water supply, the water from that well was pumped into our house. In wintertime the water pipes could be frozen, if so, we had to ask a plumber to unfreeze them. From that water well I used the wooden top piece of its hood for the assemblage. In my fantasy it looked like the head armour of a knight and so it progressed into *Water-Knight.*

LT: It's fantastic to see, how much your assemblages are reflecting the renovation process and the troubles living in the old house. You even react on your surroundings.

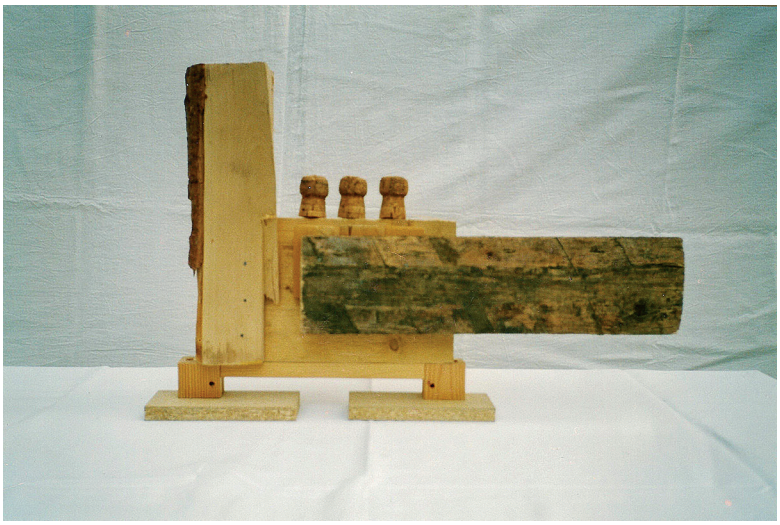
WK: Yes, so it seems. I just made them naturally.

LT: Oh, look here! This work is called *Champagne for Mauno Hartman.* You just mentioned him as an influence, did you?

WK: Yes, funny, I'll tell you the story behind it. I was invited at an opening of an exhibition in Helsinki, at the end of the eighties. It must have been on a Tuesday, because the openings of exhibitions in Helsinki were often on that day. I was with some friends at the opening and the exhibited artist invited us to the art museum Helsingin Taidehalli (Helsinki Art Hall), where there was a celebration of all the artists, who had openings at their galleries that very Tuesday. There were a lot of people. We were all drinking Finnish champagne or Elysée. I don't know, who had paid for it. I noticed the sculptor Mauno Hartman at a table. I went to him with my glass of champagne and told him, that I loved his artworks and made a toast to him. He did not know me, but he looked at me admirably and gave spontaneously a kiss on my cheek! He also gave me a just made sketch out of his sketchbook. I was quite amazed about his reply, but I thanked him for the sketch and went back to my friends. But back to your question, like I have mentioned before, his art has surely influenced and inspired me.



Champagne for Mauno Hartman, 1990



Sketch by Mauno Hartman, 9.12.1986

LT: I love the story. I could not imagine such a story behind the artwork. Is his influence notable in your assemblages and in what way?

WK: Yes, it is notable, although he is one of the influences. But, like him, I had collected old, mainly wooden material from the renovation of our house to form assemblages. And before the assemblages, in 1989, I had also made collages out of pieces torn from magazines, glued on paper and that process later influenced my assemblages. If we talk about my paper collages, I have to mention the influence of Matisse. I love his colourful collage works. And then, he made this wonderful *Rosary Chapel* in Vence, France. A total artwork in any respect! He certainly inspired me! But, back to the assemblages.

LT: Yes, I also love his art! What about this piece, in this picture called *Household?* (Page 11).

WK: Well, when I was busy with the renovation, I found all kinds of rubbish under the floor and between the walls of the house. It was like getting a householding out of all this waste: forks, knives, spoons, door-knobs, hooks, cups etc. I just made an assemblage from the found items and called it *Household.*

LT: And this one called *Connected*? (Page 11).

WK: Sometimes, in winter, we had no water, because the water pipes were frozen. We had to order a plumber to open the pipes. We were always grateful, when the water ran again. We felt, you can say, again connected. In the assemblage you can see a piece of garden hose, which symbolizes the water pipes. For the rest it is quite an abstract composition.

LT: Yes, it looks more like a carefully abstract composed collage. I like it! And this one, *Olé, Toreador*? (Page 11)

WK: It symbolises my "fight" with the house. It's quite a challenge to almost rebuild an old wooden house. So, it felt like my battlefield and I was the Toreador.

LT: Oh, fantastic! So, you'll use your imagination and fantasy to deal physically and mentally with the rebuilding battle.

WK: Yes, I think, one can use fantasy as a working tool. It's one way to tackle problems and matters. Like I told you, these assemblages were the reflections of this process.

LT: And what about this one, called *Instant Bathroom for Mrs.H.?*

WK: When we bought the house, we were dealing with a real estate agent, who sold us the property. Her name was Mrs. H. Afterwards, when we noticed the house was in bad condition, we argued with her and her customers, the house owners. They all claimed, that they didn't know about the bad condition. We knew, that it wasn't true and we were suing them in court. To make a long story short, the name of the assemblage comes from that story: I made from rubbish an instant bathroom for her!

LT: You give me a good laugh! There is so much humour in these assemblages and I can imagine, that you also had a good time making them, in spite of all the troubles with the house.

WK: Of course, it lightened up my mood.

LT: Here in this funny picture, where you have put a white sheet on the wall and on the ground, you made some kind of studio place for taking photographs. I can see a pipe-like assemblage standing on the ground and behind it, on the wall, you have nailed a glass-framed picture. You told me before, that you made your paper collages before the assemblages from your house.

The Play of Emotion and Fantasy is the book about the arts of the in Finland living Dutch Visual Artist and Interior Architect, **Willem Krijgsman** (born in 1953, Delft). The book contains a large collection of his early artworks.

In the form of two separate, interesting interviews, he takes the reader with him by showing his works through many fantastic colour photos and pictures. He explains his process of creation and artistic developments. He is showing us, how he goes from paper collages to assemblages, from assemblages via junk art into drawing, followed by his later discovering of clay, that developed into the love for modelling clay.

In this rich, with photographs and drawings, illustrated book Krijgsman shows his love for the arts in general. Making art, by discovering and researching art forms, is his most important motivation: *... for me making art is like an exploring trip: what is painting, what is making sculpture at heart? How can I use its essence and find useful translation for my own inner expressions? It's also a journey through art history: Old Master's splendour mirroring their inner via art. This is inspiring me.*

He wants, that his book of arts is working as if being in an exhibition situation. The reader can go through different stages of his artistic creations. Explanations and names under the pictures, if so, are kept to a minimum, not to disturb the viewer's own interpretation.

The artist, living in Finland since 1981, has held many solo exhibitions in his home country, especially in Helsinki and Vantaa. He has also taken part in many group exhibitions and gained publicity. Though not internationally known, his wonderful artworks are very much on the level and worthwhile exploring. They show a really motivated, talented and sincere visual artist at work.

Willem Krijgsman has published in Finnish, in 2023, the book *"Fifty-Fifty"* (BoD, ISBN: 978-952-80-9321-3) telling his integration process into the Finnish society via intertextual collages using paintings from Golden Age of Finnish Art.

BoD

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