

## **The fallen Red Beech**

**A hundred year old red beech, growing before Villa Louise was cut down following a decision by Rabobank and the city council of Veghel.**

**This beech had become a symbol, an icon for the people and church going community in Veghel. For many years, it shielded the people with its majestic crown and cleansed the air, giving oxygen in the process.**

**As I was passing the scene one morning, I was confronted with this gentle red giant laying alongside the road, felled by these barbarians with no regard for nature. Adrenaline flushed through my veins, and I rushed to the place where they were hacking away the branches which once held the crown of this tree.**

**As I was about to ask the workers what was going on there, a journalist, Martien Holthuis, passed by. his journalist took up my protests against this act of violence against an icon of peace and natural value. He also took some pictures to illustrate what was going on here, and published an article about this scandal.**

Kunstenaar biedt burgemeester en gedeputeerde object als herinnering aan

## Jan van Gogh en de honderdjarige rode beuk in Veghel..



Jan van Gogh met een gedeelte schors van de beuk. De structuur van de Veghelse boom zal terug te vinden zijn in het glazen kunstwerk

VEGHEL - Jan van Gogh is kunstenaar. En erg snel emotioneel gemaakt, wanneer het om het milieu gaat. Zo ook die vierentwintigste oktober, toen hij min of meer ievig geconfronteerd werd met het kappen van de innense grote rode beuk uit de tuin van Villa Louise. Hij zag dat de beuk al wat jaren dood was.

En er niets meer aan te redden viel. Toch klopte zijn hart van binnen. En de kunstenaar in hem werd wakker. Dit mocht niet zomaar vergeten worden.

"Tenslotte heeft die beuk ons hier honderd jaar van duizenden liers zuurstof voorzien", aldus Jan van Gogh.

Tekst en foto: Martien Holthuis

"Hart sneller kloppen..."

Jan van Gogh kwam eigenlijk toevallig op de plek waar de rode beuk op de vierentwintigste oktober werd neergehaald. "Ik kwam net het postkantoor uit. Mijn

adem stakte en mijn hart begon sneller te kloppen. En nadat een hoeveelheid adrenaline in mijn bloed was gespoten, stootte ik op het gebeuren af". Zeer verantwoordigd keek hij de mensen aan die de rode beuk aan het toezakelen waren. "Ik maakte de opmerking: *Za, die kan ons nooit meer voorzien van zuurstof. Hij wordt bedankt na honderd jaar!* En emotioneel geladen keek ik naar de schors. Die was op vele plaatsen gescheurd. Duidelijk werd mij dat de beuk al lang was doodgegaan".

"Bijna oudste ingezetene..."

"Deze beuk zou wanneer hij kon vertellen, ons vele verhalen kunnen vertellen over al wat gebeurd is in en rond de kerk van Veghel. De beuk was bijna de oudste ingezetene van Veghel. En heeft duizenden liers zuurstof afgegaan. Gratis aan de inwoners van Veghel", zo vertelt Jan van Gogh verder. "De beuk is nu gestorven. Die is nu bedankt. En de echte oorzaak zal altijd wel onbekend blijven..."

"Extra stimulans!"

"In het kader van verdraagzaamheid - het thema van mijn zojuist beëindigde expositie in Galerie Z in Nijmegen - wil ik nu de burgemeester van Veghel en gedeputeerde Welschen een object aanbieden, waarin of -aan de structuur van deze rode beuk aanwezig is. Dit project doe ik als een soort stimulans onze natuur te helpen in stand te houden. Ik wil dat alle mensen eraan herinnerd worden, dat we de natuur nodig hebben om gezond te blijven". "Ik hoop dat dit project van pakweg drie of vier meter hoog en van glas wordt gemaakt, geplaatst wordt op of in de nabijheid van de plaats waar de rode beuk heeft gestaan. Misschien wil de Rabobank - tenslotte de eigenaar van Villa Louise - het beeld wel kopen".

"Vroder wil ik kleinere objecten met de structuur van de rode beuk maken om de bevolking in Veghel ook in de gelegenheid te stellen een herinnering aan deze boom in bezit te krijgen. Dat doe ik tegen kostprijs. En in de buurt zal tegen de tijd dat de werken gereed zijn een expositie worden gehouden. Het hele project neemt", zo schat Van Gogh, "zes tot negen maanden in beslag nemen".

Alas, the people of Veghel only awoke after several publications in Het Brabants Dagblad... Also the municipality awoke, not so much concerning the fate of their eldest inhabitant, but more about the revealing of this outrageous act. Maybe this act of violence was meant to have passed by quietly and unnoticed.

In the period following the publications, I received a letter from the mayor and deputies of Veghel, urging me to take no further action, as this might evoke unnecessary commotion with the people of Veghel.

**This puzzled me, after all the red beech was a gift of Gods hand. Who are they to think that they can take the choice to destroy a wonder of nature, based solely on financial merits? Or was there a need to hide a dirty plot?**

**I felt deep sorrow and regret, that people, even though they breathe the oxygen that nature gives us, could be so heartless. But what to do? My sorrow and my will to create made me to set aside politics for the moment, but I still kept the intention to revisit this act of destruction later.**

**In the meantime, the trunk and branches of the tree had been towed away to and dumped on the yard of the building company. After some research, I managed to find the address of this company , and the owner gave me permission to make some moulds of the tree, in order to be able to keep its image for posterity.**

**In the aftermath and the deep impression this occurrence made on me, I wrote the following poem:**

## The last words of a fallen Beech

*I, once planted  
more than 100 years ago  
close to the church tower  
by Louise's hand*

*In good conditions I grew  
many meters high  
high above the people seen approaching  
who I inspired*

*Under my leafy roof, I have always stood protected  
and provided oxygen, years long  
for the people who chatted all day long*

*A task not unwelcomed and not refused  
only to end at the hands  
of those I served*

*Am I outdated, is there no wish  
for my oxygen production  
and my soul's gift*

The castings were made in wax, rather than gypsum, as wax is better suited to cope with the rugged structure and negative shapes that arise in the process of moulding.

In the meantime, while the wax was melting in the kettle, I made a frame in clay to outline the borders of the artwork, on the skin of the tree. This also fixed the general shape of the object. During the operation, I took photo's to register the process. As the wax reached its final temperature, the surface of the tree was wetted, first with water, next with hot wax. Layer by layer of wax was added until finally it was thick enough for the next step in the process.

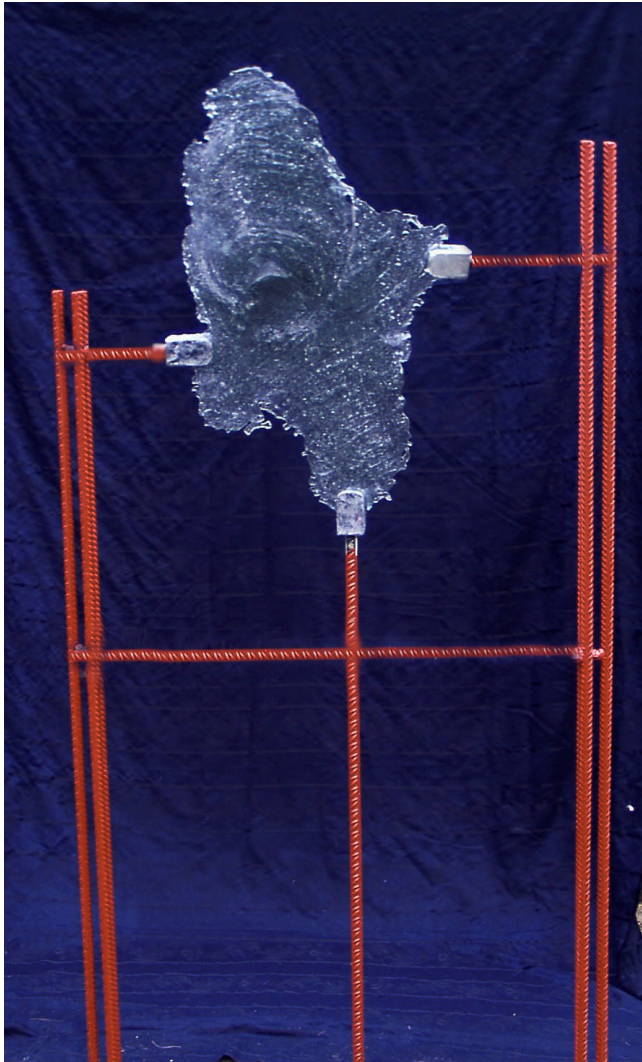
Along the mould, wooden beams were used to support the structure during the release process. The mould was also supported with chicken gauze, to keep it flexible, even after the wax had hardened. It was a tough job, but enjoying the hospitality of Maggie from nearby, where I could shower, have lunch and sleep, I rose up to yet another sunrise and started over again to do the next day's job

After finishing the wax moulds, I brought them in my minivan to the Glass Art Center in Schalkwijk, for further processing. The Glass art center had started up earlier that year, with the mission to reveal the secret of GLASS to interested artists, and to teach them how to make their own creations in this material. It also hosted a glass gallery, exhibiting the work of, mainly foreign artists. Director of this center was mr. Geuskes, he was a true countryman, originating from Limburg. Being there almost every weekend created a bond between us. I got a position as a teacher, helping the artists to work with glass. This all enabled me to prepare for larger sculptural work in glass.

The fusing process of the glass were done at the building TY of Philips in Eindhoven. Working in Schalkwijk I met several of my professional friends, like Pieter Engels, who worked at home creating objects by glassblowing techniques, and the sculptor Stef Stokhof de Jong from Wijk bij Duurstede, who ran a gallery together with his girlfriend, Corrie

For the object, I had chosen a black and blue glass type. The final mould, with the right glass composition was then placed in a large tempering furnace at Philips, where I could access the mould and fill it evenly with glass chips. During the long melting process, with a long and rigid cooling scheme to release tension, a relic arose for the 100 year old red beech.

**Recently this sculpture was fitted in a steel frame, using raw steel to closely match the organic structure of the relic.**



**My intent is to display this object as an affront to people who recklessky and carelessly destroy OUR NATURE**

**Jan van Gogh, visual artist**