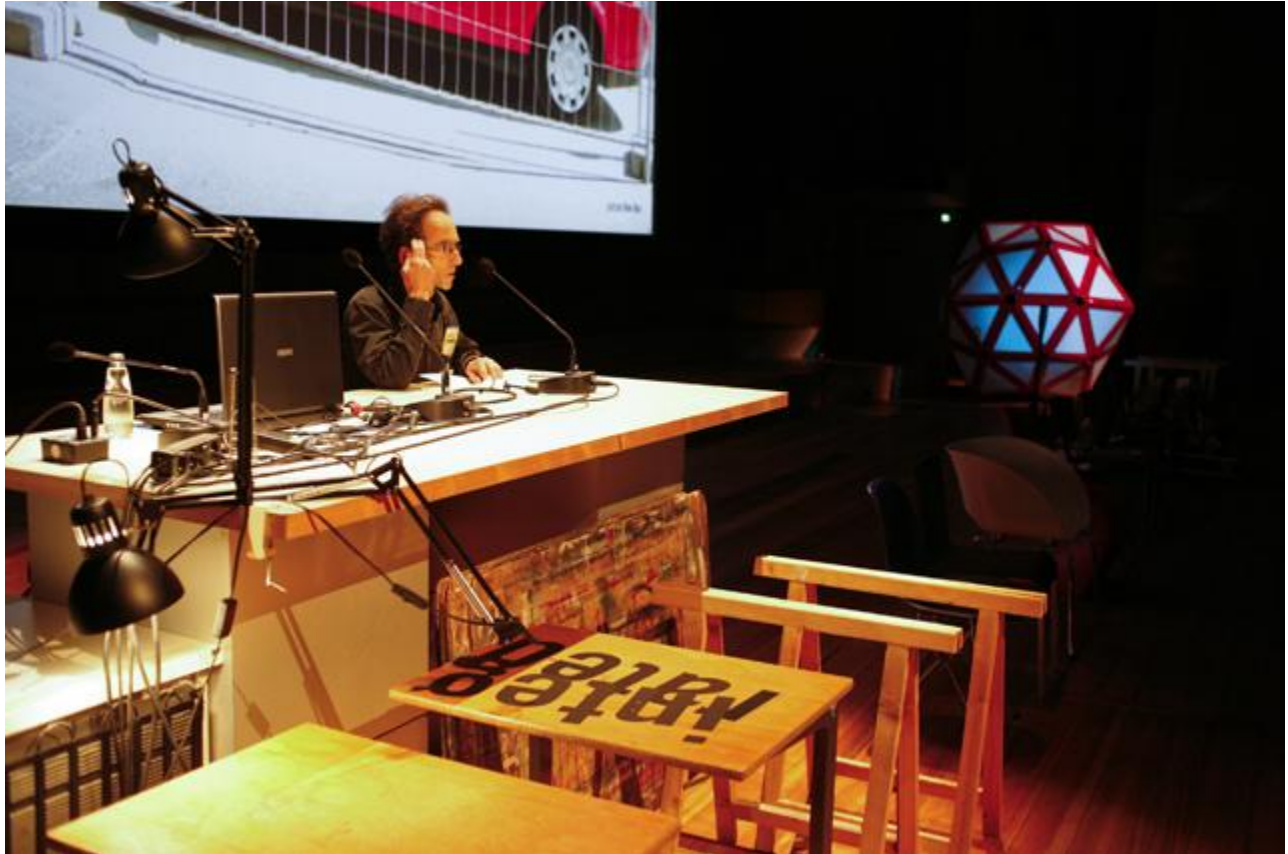


## Creative Creatures

*The ideas and the work of the American and European painters, songwriters, photographers, fiction and non-fiction authors, musicians, film makers, architects, designers, poets, and dreamers I met during my 20 years in America. --*

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### #4 / Pleun Vos, graphic designer, Antwerp, Belgium

We were both much younger. It was 1978 and I was a senior partner in Tel Design in The Hague, the Netherlands—one of the top Dutch design studios. Pleun had just graduated from St. Joost art academy in Breda, in those years thanks to a couple of fabulous professors one of the best graphic design colleges in Europe. I had hired Pleun already during his intern period, and we'd done a few good projects together including an information system for the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam. In 1978 we were hired to do an identity program for the City of Enschede, on the Dutch-German border. Its mayor was a highly regarded member of the Social Democrats (ask any American and he'll tell you a Commie heart beats in every Socialist ...). The city council was dominated by "Reds" too; there was a large opposition front built up of Christian Democrats and all kinds of small parties, some of them "worse than Communists," others rather conservative, for Holland anyway.

Pleun came with a brilliant design proposal perfectly fit for the times—the 1970s—and far beyond that visually democratized the city government and its apparatus. Each entity within the city whether elected

or appointed got its own identity; these were smartly glued together to always be recognizable as belonging to the same “club.” Pleun and I proudly presented our proposals first to the mayor, then to the elected commissioners (“commissars” Americans would call them ...), then to the whole city council, the top staff and the media. Unexpected heated discussions followed; the Christian Democrats and the Liberals (= conservatives in Holland) loudly expressed their enthusiasm; therefore the Socialists voted against. The mayor was ashamed—his party should behave as decent socialists (=progressives) should, which means be open to the new times and not “fall back on the old city logo which was in fact a town seal dating back to the serf times of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.” To no avail. Our proposal was trashed; the City of Enschede kept its almost medieval town seal. At least they paid our bill without complaining. By the way, Enschede’s public information officer, who had selected us to do the design, was named Nico Smoes, which in English would read as Nick Lame Excuse. After a few years on the job he decided his was not the right name for a government spokesperson and changed it into Nico van Esmond, something like Nick Esmouth. Pity.

Pleun and I continued to work together, on and off. I went my way; he became a partner in another design group. In the end he was the designer for the poetry festival I started in The Hague. By that time he was married to the conceptual clay artist Anne Ausloos and lived in Antwerp, Belgium. He showed he was smarter than I am, smart enough to also buy a garden cottage behind 17<sup>th</sup> century mansions on one of Amsterdam’s handsomest canals in the 1980s; by now this must be worth a small fortune (he cannot spend much time there often because his daughter Andrea is now studying at the University of Amsterdam and living like a princess in the cottage. He has to ask her permission to stay overnight). Pleun and his family (there’s a son too: Martijn) also bought a home in a miniature town in eastern Belgium, in the Ardennes area (remember General Patton and the Battle of the Bulge?). Almost on the Belgian-French border, it offers them easy access to splendid nature.

As a graphic designer, Pleun excels without striving for a position in the foreground. He stays away from anything one could call “commercial design.” His designs, even those for public companies, are subtle; they demand the viewer to think and think again. His sense of typography is ... just sensational, and sensual too, and his eye is sharp and dedicated to fine detail. Nowadays he also teaches, at the same art academy he himself was educated. I am sure he inspires his students just as his own phenomenal teachers inspired him and prepared him for a long career of making unique and thoughtful designs.

Pleun and his wife Anne and their kids came to visit us in New Mexico a few years ago (Anne already spent a few weeks in Matfield Green, Kansas as well). They chose the wrong period: it was early April and it was uncommonly cold and wet and dark. We had found them an old adobe home to stay in but we had forgotten that this was the week the village of Barranca diverted the creek’s water and closed off the ditch for the 6-monthly cleaning. So, no running water for a week; not a drop came from the faucets; no dish could be washed, no shower could be taken. These city folks from Antwerp had to send their city kids down the mesa to the Chama River to fill buckets and drag these back uphill. Luckily, they and their kids love country life, and they enjoyed the daily chores even if it rained cats and dogs.

*Ton Haak, June 2012*