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Private Domain 81 (28/6/2011)

Matijs van de Kerkhof

Matijs van de Kerkhof's exhibition can already be considered a big success. Sometimes I hear that his work shows resemblance to Aaron van Erp's work. The thought has never crossed my mind but I can't blame a superficial viewer who at first glance seems to recognize Aaron's dark images in a sort of 'aha! experience'. Man needs a label, a form of categorizing your memory in order to create some quietude in your life. The background of Aaron's work, the way he experiences and sees the world, is quite different. Aaron's world is nourished and supported by the deepest experiences in his youth, maybe even further. He sees the world as a tangle of violence between people, what they do to themselves: humiliations; indomitable, whimsical nature; evil lurking in dark corners waiting to strike.

Matijs paints a theatrical world, a world in which Matijs as a person can hide, a staged world which leads the viewer away from his own soul. Matijs just peeps into this self-created world to keep out of range. No wonder all of Matijs' works are untitled. Giving titles is very dangerous. Aaron gives titles in order to alleviate or even ridicule suffering, driving away his own fears. Matijs' theatrical world shows stills of events which have neither beginning nor end. The viewer can fill in and finish it himself.



The dwarf being force-fed, oil on canvas, 90x180, 2005 *Untitled, acrylic paint on canvas, 100x140, 2011*

In Aaron's case we know that those dwarves are degenerated human beings. Aaron's space is more real in the present, it could be an existing space, where dark scenes take place. Matijs' space has been staged, perhaps based on a picture from days long past, it could be a space in one of those Venetian buildings, with alienating perspectives in one scene. Exactly that makes it exciting, exactly what's wrong gives dimension to the scene. People in robes? walk in and out. A sharply outlined, stiff incidence of light emphasizes dark surroundings. What is the crouching man doing there? The resemblance between these two artists is that their work is surreal, figurative yet abstract. As a viewer you can't quite catch it, much is left up to you.

Matijs van de Kerkhof's work leans more towards the psychomagic.



Unt., oil on canvas, 150x250, 2011



In a Hall with mead and mead, 120x150, 2011



Unt., acrylic paint on canvas, 70x69, 2011



Unt., acrylic paint on canvas, 100x110, 2011

The paintings at the top from Aaron are based on the Norwegian death metal band 'Darkthrone' with their pop song "I am Hall mead slesk of Mjød" (In a Hall with mead and mead) . It is about events concerning the Norwegian supreme god 'Odin', God of battle and war. The past year Aaron has painted only very dark paintings derived from seventeenth century painters like Caravaggio (1571-1610) and the Spanish painter José de Ribera (1591-1652). Almost solid black backgrounds from which suddenly light falls on figures. Aaron van Erp paints with oil, Matijs van de Kerkhof with acrylic paint, a synthetic paint which dries quickly and seems less smooth and thick. The origin of Matijs van de Kerkhof's paintings is partly a mystery. He uses random elements from pictures, combines these with theatrical settings which suggest a metaphysical space in which group dynamics and balances of power are reflected. The painting on the left was inspired by two people carrying a courgette. The upper parts of the figures have been painted transparently yet still vaguely visible, adding to the mystery and magic. In a theatre the light is manipulated by beams of light.



Unt., acrylic paint on canvas, 100x140, 2011



Unt., acrylic paint on canvas, 100x120, 2009

The origin of the painting top left can be traced back to a simple picture in a paper in which some men are sitting on a couch. For Matijs van de Kerkhof this rather banal occasion induced him to create a mysterious painting.



The houses are German rather than Dutch. Unexpected beams of light pierce houses and persons. Differences in perspective strengthen the image and the purplish glow in many of his paintings create a psychomagic atmosphere. Nothing much happens, but the purplish glow anticipates disaster rather than happiness, a forerunner of the storm to come.



E. Hopper, A woman in the Sun, oil on canvas, 101.6x152.4 1961



G. de Chirico, Mystery and Melancholy of a Street, 88x72, 1914

The sharply outlined beams of light remind me of the work of Edward Hopper (1887-1967) and Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978). Melancholy and passivity are notions which characterize the work of these artists, to which Matijs van de Kerkhof is no stranger.



Unt., acrylic paint on canvas, 24x30, 2011



Unt., acrylic paint on canvas, 24x30, 2011

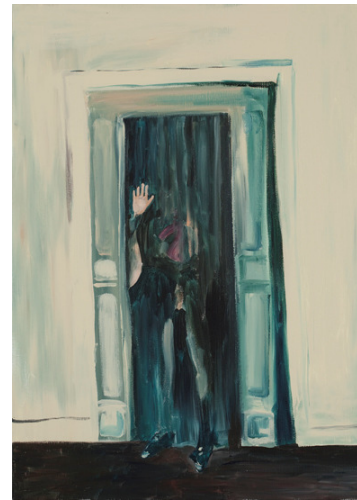
The work of Matijs van de Kerkhof also reminds me of influences from the movies, for instance the work of David Lynch, especially his famous film 'Blue Velvet' with its alienating and hallucinating light effects.

'I'm involved in a mystery'. I'm in the middle of it', says one of the main characters. The dark, the hidden, the surreal are important for David Lynch.

In the case of Matijs van de Kerkhof it is also about desolation, the mysteriousness by placing a perhaps real event out of context, by isolating it and bringing it to a stop, by creating a total image by means of unusual colours, light effects and impossible perspectives, leaving the viewer with only questions. It calls for an interaction which actually neither takes place nor is answered.



Unt., acrylic paint on canvas, 70x100, 2011



Unt., acrylic paint on canvas, 100x70, 2011



Unt., acrylic paint on canvas, 40x80, 2011



Unt., acrylic paint on canvas, 100x140, 2011

We haven't seen the last of this painter.

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