
**INTERVIEW
HENK PIJNENBURG
WITH BLADE**

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HP: What was the first canvas you made?

B: It's a tag of course. I crowned myself immediately. I'm the Best of all!!

HP: Your name Blade appears in almost every painting. What does Blade mean to you?

B: I use the name Blade in all my works because I'm the best and most versatile artist! In 1972 I worked in a supermarket named Pathmark. I was the stock boy and used a box cutter or razor blade to open boxes. Then, when teenage fights were happening, I always carried my box cutter blade and hence the name Blade was born, call it coincidence if you like. The name exactly represents my ideas. I enjoy being an international artist very much. I also like the popularity that comes with it. I just wish people were more open-minded, like they are toward Jeff Koons and Keith Haring. 'Blade' also symbolizes my twenty-year-long relationship with the original graffiti writers. Eight people in our neighbourhood were ahead of everyone else in the city. You can never imagine what an incredible feeling it was at the age of sixteen. Back then kids respected you. There were trains that I painted at the age of eighteen that were still in perfect condition when I was twenty-four! Henry Chalfant has proof of this. It wasn't until the early eighties that everything changed for the worse. Thirteen and fourteen-year-old kids would go out and disrespectfully overwrite everyone on purpose in order to get famous and to show how tough they were. In these days, every subway in New York was ruined and that is the reason graffiti died. The next generation of kids had no respect for themselves or anyone else and they didn't care about anything. The majority of the top artists were in their twenties and had responsibilities, such as work, college and relationships. It's a shame that this beautiful work was destroyed.



First single
Spray paint on canvas
23.4x23.4" | 1982



Blade's first steps
1972 | age 15,5



Havin' fun
Fresh new cans of paint
for the next creation
1973-1974 | age 16



Quik/Blade, Crystal Images
Spray paint/
marker on canvas
68.25x83.85" | 1992

HP: Is your name a 'model' for you to create new shapes and compositions?

B: Shape and composition are important because you should always challenge yourself as an artist to try and reach beyond your own boundaries. It makes you better overall.

HP: Who were you influenced by?

B: I admire Phase 2, Staff 161, Super Kool 223 and Quik the most. They were the best. I've been friends with Quik for years. We've seen a lot of changes in our lives and in our work. Quik expresses his inner emotions in his work, his happiness with his daughter, his pain and his sadness about black Americans in the U.S.A. In 1992 we co-operated for the painting 'Crystal Images' to see if we could create the ultimate in New Age Art! The special exhibition at the Gemeente Museum Helmond in the Netherlands - with a very beautiful catalogue designed by Swip Stolk - was awarded as one of the best books of 1992. I like to watch modern graffiti works, in order to see what up-and-coming artists are into, both mentally and spiritually. You can feel the vibes some new works and sculptures exude. It's truly exciting! I try not to be influenced by anyone and work of artists that is openly 'influenced' disappoints me. I don't like to copy anything. If I don't think about or dream about something, I don't create anything. Why cheat people? They should be able to recognize the quality of work regardless of skin colour.

HP: Blade, could you explain something about the process of getting ideas for creating paintings?

B: I don't know why, but from the age of seventeen onward I have been having the same kind of dream. I start to fly up to the sky, where I see the clouds and feel the moisture on my skin and I continue to soar higher and higher, faster and faster, until I



Invisie Scene Production
Spray paint/
marker on Canvas
70.59x129.48" | 1984



'Desire' - My desire is to feel above all worlds' nonsense and to float
Spray paint/
marker on canvas
50.7x81.9" | 1992



Blade's famous Thunderbird 1972



Party Time
Spray paint/
marker on canvas
81.12x138.84" | 1983



Galaxy Gangster
Spray paint/
marker on canvas
71.37x128.7" | 1983

see nothing but black outer space and stars. That's the reason black is so prominent in my paintings. I arrive at the same point in my dream at least five to ten times a year. I get very scared and start falling back to earth rapidly, faster and faster, until I hit the ground at 100 miles per hour. But it feels like I'm landing on soft clouds. When I wake up I often wish that I would not be scared in that dream because I enjoy flying through the endless galaxy. It's so real to me and that's why I draw blue skies and big, puffy clouds and deep, black endless space!! My painting 'Desire' comes from something I saw in a dream. This little face with four-foot long hair, standing on end. Dolores (my former girlfriend) told me I couldn't stop laughing in my sleep. She woke me because she knew I sometimes forget my dreams. So I jumped out of bed and began to sketch. I started at 3.30 AM. Dolores liked to see it when it was finished because it was hard to explain what I was dreaming. Another painting is 'Dreamin' of Esplanade' (a tunnel between the Bronx and Manhattan). This is what you could call a more realistic painting - it's a representation of what comes back to me immediately after seeing a beloved place. My lovely car broke down (Thunderbird 1972) and I had to take the subway. I passed through the Esplanade tunnel and I opened the window in the train to smell the tracks. It still drives me crazy. I got off the train and stood at the edge of the platform. I felt my throat tighten and my eyes water. I spent the best years of my childhood there, from the age of seventeen to twenty-five. I was there with my best friend, Comet. The other King! We never missed a weekend of train bombing. The next train pulled in and I went home to become an adult. It sucks not being eighteen anymore! The next three days I made 'Dreamin' of Esplanade'.

HP: Can you describe the situation in which you create your paintings?

B: I just like to be alone when I'm creating. I have hundreds of markers and you can make really create great things when you enjoy your inner serenity.

HP: Over the years you've created many special characters.

B: My characters are typical Blade ones, like my 'Joint Man' (1983), 'Galaxy Gangster' (1983) and 'Party Time' (1983). These are characters I've created during the last twenty years of graffiti. I don't like doing famous characters everybody knows, I like inventing new characters that no one has ever seen. My painting 'Party Time' was made to enable you to look back into the depths of vastness, deeper and deeper, until you grasp what the character expresses in the work. While watching this painting you can see the galaxy is done first, then the character and finally the name. Drawn in 'freestyle', layered colours to make the background look deeper. I made this work in the same period as the 'Galaxy Gangster'. Two totally different works, both difficult, but in 'Party Time' the background and the characters were done first, triple-layered lettering added last leaves no room for any mistakes. So you have to get the name right the first time, it cannot be corrected. Very, very difficult. No measuring equipment, no pencil. Free hand - freestyle!! So I did a lot of typical Blade characters in a humorous manner.

HP: I have always been under the impression your paintings were influenced by music?

B: I love to create while I'm listening to jazz. I always listen to the Pat Metheny Group, Spyro Gyra, Bob James, Earl Kluge, Sonny Rollins, The Rippingtons and Gerald Albright. I have every Pat Metheny album - he's my favourite. I don't know why I never took music lessons, but I play eight different instruments. I bought a small music studio



Blade as drummer
With Marching Band
1967-1968



The Bazay
Jam Band
Cd design
front side
2003



Forms of Illusions
Spray paint/
marker on canvas
35.1x58.5" | 1987



Funk through Funky
- New Age Art
Production
spray paint/
marker on canvas
50.7x97.5" | 1992

to record in, so I can put everything together and play it back. People who have heard my music think they're listening to a professional Jazz group so I have to explain them that I'm the one playing all the instruments. That's also the reason why I incorporate musical designs in my work. My paintings are like music! Most people think went to art school. Well, I did not. For me, being King of the underground was art school. Being the best. To be better than ten to twenty thousand other kids. I come from a music-loving family. My uncle has been a jazz drummer since the thirties. In 1968 Blade's aunt gave me the first bass, bought from Jamesway in Saratoga, for my eleventh birthday. I have been jamming ever since. As a teenager I used to jam with friends in Crachee's bedroom, which was in his mom's apartment in the Parkside projects. In our 'The Bazay Jam Band'. In the seventies and early eighties all the Bronx born teenagers made music: Steven 'Blade' Ogburn (bass), Mitchell 'Crachee' Weiss (saxophone), Jody Bellamy (Lead Singer), Santino, Harvey, Dave, Paul Lobel and Jody P. In 2003 a record came out with raw Funk classics from 'The Bazay Jam Band'. Heavy, hard funk, dark, psychedelic electro-funk to rock your graffiti-drenched brain. 'Forms of Illusions' (1987) is certainly influenced by music, like most of my works, but this painting was one of my first abstract paintings.

HP: Have you ever heard of Kandinsky?

B: I have never heard of him, I'm only familiar with graffiti artists.

The less I know, the better for my art.

HP: I ask you this because when I study your paintings it looks as if you invented entire parts of modern art history in your own manner. 'Forms of Illusions' (1987), for example, reminded me of the paintings Kandinsky made after 1920.

Your paintings are so different: from the bubble letter to minimalist shapes, such as 'Imaginary Dreams' (1986), 'Suspended in Time' (1987), 'Manifestations' (1988) or 'New Visions' (1990) to surrealist paintings, like 'Mental Hypnosis' (1984), 'Universal Visions' (1991) and 'Transitions' (1999). In recent years more entirely abstract paintings have appeared (you call it abstract graffiti or abstagraf) like 'Absta-graf 1st Production' (1994), 'Cosmic Splash' (1995) and 'Galactic Dimensions' (2008). Your dot paintings 'Travelling to the End of the World in my Mind's Eye' (1995) and 'Diamond in Space' (2005) demonstrate a strong affinity with post-impressionism. You seem to be flying through the history of art. Your paintings are figurative, decorative, impressionist, surrealist, abstract, graphic and bear a strong relationship to music.

B: I follow my heart, Henk, I dream my paintings. Perhaps this sounds too simple for you. My paintings are all full of music. In my music and paintings I feel as if I'm totally free. To be free is the most important thing for me.

HP: What about your painting 'Funk through Funky'?

B: With 'Funk through Funky'! I felt like a kid the other day. In a silly and wild manner I picked the brightest colours I could find. I put them on the floor and tried to bomb like I used to in the old days. It was great fun. No sketching or anything. Just bombing a canvas. Reacting with colour after colour. Dolores came home and found me, looking like a madman, because I was standing there in a haze of paint. Usually I air the house but now I wanted to regain that old sensation. There I was, standing, with paint all over the place. Man, oh man! That was good fun. I always play early James Brown music from the seventies when I feel like this...

HP: In recent years you've been referring to your paintings as 'New Age Art'.

B: The reason I call my new work 'New Age Art' is that we're living in a new era and when I look at my creations I feel that they have nothing in common with any other type of art. Most art forms are out of fashion today. My work is something totally new. That's why I don't produce many paintings, not more than ten works a year! Only when I'm feeling creative. Why would I make loads of paintings? Many paintings you see are just a rush job for money. These paintings look sloppy or cheap! I only want to create beautiful works of art that can be enjoyed and appreciated for years and years. My work is never a copy from anyone else. I try to create new and exciting ideas whenever possible.

HP: Could you give me a summary of the developments in your painting style?

B:

1 | BUBBLE LETTER STYLE
(1972, discovered by Phase 2)

The bubble letter marked the beginning of the development of graffiti. It's like an embryo, it's the birth of life. I'll always pay respect to this letter.

2 | OVERLAPPING THREE-DIMENSIONAL LETTER
I invented this letter in 1974.

3 | THREE-DIMENSIONAL BLOCK BUSTER STYLE
(1977, invented by me)
This letter is angular, squarely-built and large. I like this one because the letter is clear, visible from a distance and abstract.

4 | FREESTYLE
(about 1983 f.e. Party Time 1983)
A very difficult style, you can't allow yourself to make any mistakes, you have to work very fast and you have to get it right the first time.

5 | INVISISEEN PRODUCTIONS (1984)
The background is done first and the overlapping lettering afterward for clarity.

6 | 'GRAFFITI ANEW' (1987/1988)
This signifies my first dreams in new concepts, reaching for a new direction.

7 | MUSIC-INFLUENCED PAINTINGS (since 1987)
The musical influence in my work comes from my ancestry (my uncle played the drums with Count Basie & Earl Garner in the 1930s and 1940s). I developed a musical talent and taught myself to play the bass. In the seventies I toured professionally with my funk and disco band, 'The Bazay Band'.



In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida,
-New Age Art Molecule
Production
Spray paint/
marker on canvas
52.65x117" | 1997

8 | ABSTRACT GRAFFITI OR ABSTAGRAF
(since 1987)
Abstract graffiti is my interpretation of combining graffiti and letters to achieve a different effect. Sometimes I call it absta-graffiti. I'm playing with words. Abstract also means that the works are without any figurative representation. I have been doing this since I started out. My latest works, like Rhythms of the Universe and Colors of Spirit, are abstract.

9 | NEW VISIONS
(letters in abstract style, 1990)
New Visions is exactly what it sounds like.

Paintings of new things I had envisioned. Very simple cut out letters, minimal, abstract-figurative because you're able to read them.

10 | NEW AGE ART PRODUCTIONS (since 1992)
It's a way to express the expansion of art by moving in a forward direction. Back then, we approached 2000 and I hoped for a better world.

11 | DOT PAINTINGS (1995)
I use thousands of dots in my galaxy paintings, in order to create new forms. I call it 'New Age Art Molecule Production'. 'In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida' is such a painting.



Rhythms of the Universe
Spray paint/
marker on canvas
81.9x26.13" | 2008

HP: You're very lyrical about your painting 'In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida' What does it mean?

B: It means In-A-Garden-Of-Eden. It is a very famous song from 1968 by the rock and roll group 'Iron Butterfly'.

HP: Why does this painting mean so much to you?

B: It's a New Age Art Molecule production and it is my personal favourite. It's something no one on earth has ever done before. Letters entirely made up of dots. I started out with nothing but a black background and added the lettering later, like I did with party time). Each letter consists of 2000 individual dots. It's the first step in my New Age Art. In the yellow sphere is an abstract man who is windsurfing in space. I finished this painting in 1997 whereas I already mentioned it in 1995. It took two years of inner preparation to create this painting. Another painting that's similar with respect to the dot concept is 'Travelling to the End of the World in my Mind's Eye', which I completed in 1995.

HP: Your last paintings 'Rhythms of the Universe' and 'Colors of Spirit' signal a completely new direction. In my opinion, these works are abstract with beautiful decorative elements. They remind me of music, am I really listening to music here?

B: Indeed it was if I could see music inside my soul. I created 'Rhythms of the Universe' and 'Colors of Spirit' because I'm a musician and the bright, flowing colours are part of my inner spirit. I've been a professional bass player for over thirty-five years. The last time I performed was in 2007 with a group called 'Illicit' in Amsterdam. These paintings are very complicated due to all those details. It took me over a week to complete one painting. I worked at least five hours a day on each painting. I had to go to a store in upstate New York to find certain colours I needed. I had trouble finding two different shades of silver that were necessary to make the contrast visible. No matter how often you look at this painting, you'll always find some details that you did not notice before. 'Colors of Spirit' is alive, vibrant, with extravagant colours, flowing throughout my entire being. I paint according to how I feel and what I feel on the inside.



Colors of Spirit
Spray paint/
marker on canvas
25.35x81.12" | 2008