

From the catalogue Marenne Welten, Kabinetten van de Vleeshal Middelburg 2000 :

### **The camouflage colour of the image**

White dominates in Marenne Welten's paintings. Not so much a clear white showing itself as an autonomous colour, but more of an omnipresent, unemphatic glimmer of white, invoking a sense of the absence or fading of colour.

In the visual arts, white often represents a beginning. A white wall, a white canvas waits to be worked on, painted, coloured and at least in part covered. The images that Marenne Welten extracts from the empty canvas appear unwilling to break loose from the first stage. Because of their material evanescence and sparsity they only just appear to be present. Sometimes, they create an impression of conscious incompleteness. They are mostly human figures and heads, children or adults, very occasionally animals, a horse or a dog. Perhaps it is more fitting to speak of apparitions of people and animals, for they are transparent figures with fading contours or drawn with thin, delicate lines. They haunt an unidentifiable space, looming out of nowhere. They barely have mass, yet find themselves on firm ground. In spite of the use of oil paints the works are little paintings, sooner reminiscent of the openness and absence of 'filling' that more generally characterizes drawings. In fact scarcely any paint is used, the structure of the linen remains visible. When the images become too concrete, too manifest, paint is removed or everything is covered with a thin, transparent layer of white that, in a sense, pushes back the representation.

Because of this Marenne Welten's images seem to come from a different, unreal world. Still, the figures are in themselves familiar, there is nothing artificial about them. A simple line, just a silhouette suffices to depict a figure. But the almost childlike simplicity and directness characterizing the works also contains typical elements such as the emphasizing of certain details, of distortion or enlargement. A ballerina bears an oversized, top-heavy head on her frail body, a figure lacks a leg, yet stands firmly upright, eyes are overly accentuated into dark, deep caves, a mouth with pronounced teeth turns a face into a grimace. Additionally, images sometimes shift over each other, or people's and animals' body parts simultaneously adopt different positions.

Although the images may well appear to belong to a fleeting, alienating dream, of which some fragments have remained, they rather stem from a specific experience of reality. Marenne Welten has a formidable ability to superimpose her own projections onto reality. 'There is no single image. Not even when I close my eyes. When I look at something, it's almost never in an open-minded way, because I see, suppose or think several images at one time'. Her perception sometimes turns the world upside down, a man crossing the street is all at once seen on his head. However, she isn't just involved in an unavoidable, at times burdening, dialogue with her surroundings, she also constantly sees herself as an outsider, or through the eyes of an alter ego. The images in the paintings are the necessary outcome of such experiences. The representations she paints are in the head from the outset. She has

literally seen them. The coming into being of a painting is therefore direct and relatively brief. The representation is not 'conceived' while working, it is in fact already present

Marenne Welten's struggle with the perception of reality does not resolve itself in the depiction of different images and interpretations. Her work does not offer the viewer a range of possibilities for and variations on a single theme. On the contrary, the images are highly reticent, in effect no more than a thought, a barely uttered word. In this, the direct, simple rendition, at times almost gauche, the use of colour which tend towards monochrome, the unidentifiable space, all fulfill a function. A definite statement, a definitive image must be avoided. The obvious is not part of Marenne Welten's experience. People, things, images are not in stasis, "tomorrow everything can be different". Felt too deeply, this realisation is, in its ultimate ramifications, unbearable. After all, it is in the changeability of everything in life where the root of mortality un avoidably lies. Presumably, this plays a part in Marenne Welten's restraint towards her subjects. In the reluctance to 'capture' things, people, loved ones in images. The actions of wiping away paint, repainting, applying double representations, all that not only prohibits the unequivocal point of view, but also creates a necessary distance towards the images, that shroud themselves in the white camouflage colour of the canvas.

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