

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

Intuition + interpretation + projection

We're lunching in a cafe in Brussels. We're having the day's special: roast beef with spinach and potatoes. The meal reminds me of holidays in England, although my beer has that typical Belgian flavour. We talk about our plans for the future, the Police are playing- I have that record too, great drummer- I watch a girl walking in. I begin to realise that my dreary mood stems from an unpleasant conversation the day before.

Whilst all this is happening, I begin to notice my companion's teeth. Pieces of spinach lodged between aged teeth, neglected through lack of money, work their way to the forefront of my consciousness and begin to dance in front of my eyes. A moment of alienation.

Marenne Welten has the ability to capture such experiences with great precision. Her paintings either spring from the memory of moments like these, or she experiences them during the process of painting. The various layers forming the foundation of her paintings can be compared to the fragments of memories and impressions during lunch. The dancing bits of spinach-the things that cause her to wonder-are, for example, body parts that to her have suddenly lost their normal meaning. In her perception her own nose, when blocked, grows to enormous proportions. Or perhaps someone else's nose, when its shape suddenly strikes her.

Sometimes, you can easily identify yourself with Welten's work. A portrait of someone whose head is encased in a large cloud, for example, can perhaps remind you of the haze that can paralyse you first thing in the morning. Similarly, the painting of the back of a full head of hair will forever be the image I connect with the feeling of my own hair in my neck, when I was still young. This easy recognition allows her paintings to be symbolic of certain memories, feelings and thoughts.

Welten's symbolism, however, comes about almost intuitively. Therefore- to herself as well- it is at times just as unreliable as dreams are. You know dreams are full of symbolism, but you will never know exactly what the symbols represent. After all, you are always the one interpreting them and so, inevitably, making your own projections.

This applies more to Welten's oil paintings than it does to her gouaches. The latter are made at greater speed and with more directness, and so appear to be less ambiguous. Oil paint allows (and at the same time forces) Welten to take more time over her paintings. These have more layers, in both a literal and a figurative sense, and give her space to further develop an important theme in her work: power versus powerlessness. Connecting the gouaches and the oils are Welten's concentration, surprise, curiosity and intuition, and the powerful symbols she offers viewers to identify themselves with.

Rutger Wolfson