



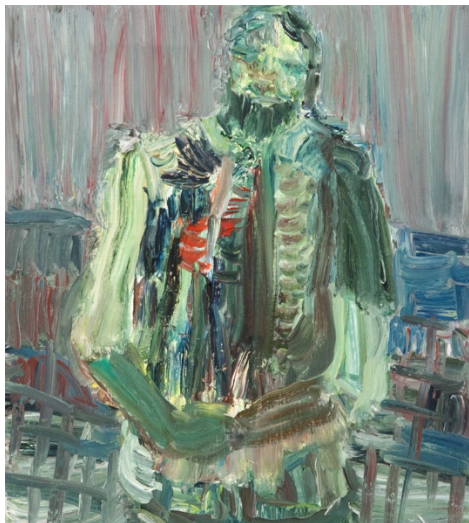
The triumph of matter: Marenne Welten baptizes U.S. history in viscous brushstrokes

Annelies Van Belle
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*God of the Manacle
As of the Free—
Take not my Liberty
Away from Me—*

Thus goes the last stanza of Emily Dickinson's poem "Let us play yesterday." It is the guiding principle of Marenne Welten's new series of paintings, which take the history of the early U.S. as a starting point. In the poem, Dickinson looks back on a turbulent relationship in her youth, when she was still rashly absorbed in love. Can she still do this today? Is the price of passion always a loss of freedom, or does it just make us freer, "wilder" beings? The whole area of tension in this poem consists of breaking out resulting in vulnerability, surrender with bondage as a danger.

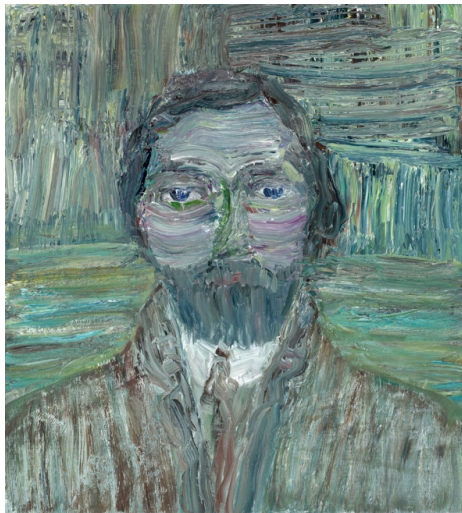
What does this have to do with the new work of Marenne Welten? For that, we may have to delve deeper into the structure of her latest project. Welten is just as much a researcher as a painter. Before she picks up the brush, there is usually a period of study on a specific theme. We fell in love with her work in 2015, when she exhibited under the heading "It is not all right" with her stuffy, somewhat claustrophobic interiors in De Pont, Tilburg. In addition to the alienating atmosphere, her handling of the painter's matter in particular appealed to us: transparent oil paint, in dusty colors, applied with generous brushstrokes on a white canvas that can consciously still shine through.



Executed outlaw II, 52 x 48 cm oil on linen 2016

This time, not something as tangible as "interiors" but a much broader theme is the trigger for a new series. During a stay in New York, she became fascinated with the raw stories of the European settlers from 1800 in the U.S., and allied with them: for the rugged American landscape and the original inhabitants, the Indians. More specifically, she zooms in on the family portraits of the settlers in front of their new, self-built house. You can read the hardships on their faces, as gnarled as the landscape itself. Not all images she finds suck her in like that. "Difficult", Welten writes, "I find the photos of dead criminals who were photographed upright and tied up in front of the archive. The magical mind in me doesn't want to look into the dead eyes. By painting the criminals I expropriate them and draw them into my world. "

Again, Welten's paint treatment is intriguing. Where she previously worked with a lot of medium, and the white in the painting was formed by the linen of the canvas, she now gives a leading role to a thick white underlay of oil paint. This gives her new works something luminous, almost fluorescent. It seems as if a fight is taking place on the canvases, between the unruly, pasty basis, and everything of color that wants to come afterwards. That bottom layer is not very receptive and friendly. It is pushing and squeezing, a swirling and swarming brushstrokes that feels like a snake pit.



Silas, 50 x 45 cm oil on linen 2018

You can roughly divide artists into two groups: those who have a clear goal in mind, a story they want to be told, and use all their acquired technicality and craft for this. And on the other end of the spectrum you have someone like Welten. Her starting point is the story, the history, the content. But gradually matter eventually triumphs. She masters the art of letting go like no other, right up to the tipping point where only the paint is in charge. And the paint here is no longer paint, but an almost living creature, with a more unruly character, at least something balorike like glue, silicone or modeling clay. As an artist you have to dare to do that: do so much violence to your material, and still end up with something beautiful. Because that is what they are, the portraits of Welten.

She puts it this way: "Converting the data that I collect by reading a lot about the subject, I usually don't apply literally in my work. It is a subtle process in which all information lies dormant in me indefinitely. Then I start to work and I research the points of contact with which I can connect. The subject is explained and unraveled as a piece of clothing. " The underlying story is only a tool for Welten, a gateway to further investigate painting. This is why her works are so figurative and abstract at the same time, or in other words: so abstract in their figuration.



Snow, 53 x 48 cm oil on linen 2016

Nevertheless, the way she treats the matter also reinforces the content. Yesterday's muted colors almost make you feel that raw, grim past. This brings us back to Emily Dickinson's poem. "Play yesterday", of course, simply means tuning into the past, but also refers to freedom and bondage, themes that are completely intertwined with that early history of the US. "Immigration is a universal theme", says Welten, "man has always been a traveler. The artist is for himself a pioneer in an unexplored land, everything has to be discovered, conquered and mined. "

Just as Dickinson in "Play yesterday" makes fun of the classical poetic form, Marenne Welten breaks free from the classical laws of painting. Her subjects linger in an unnamed intermediate area, a no-man's-land, which exerts an inescapable attraction on our viewing. She lets herself be carried away by the rebellious logic of the creative process, where only intuition is in charge. Nothing more beautiful than an artist who takes off the handcuffs and walks his own sovereign course. That is what Marenne Welten does. She organizes her own party, which no longer has anything to do with what we usually expect from an event on canvas. We are eagerly looking forward to the following.



The brothers Sam & Billy, executed outlaws, 54 x 49 cm oil on linen 2017