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## Bettie van Haaster

The gesture for us will no longer be a fixed moment in the universal dynamism: it will be, definitely, the eternal dynamic sensation as such. Everything moves, everything runs, everything turns quickly. A figure is never stable in front of us but appears and disappears incessantly.

*U. Boccioni, C. Carrà, L. Russolo, G. Balla, G. Severini,  
Technical poster of futurist painting [Manifesto  
tecnico della pittura futurista], 11th April 1910.*



*Knoop*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 30x35cm.

What distinguishes the Dutch Bettie van Haaster from other painters is her highly emotional charge expressed via an intense use of chromatism. Her material relationship with colour is at the basis of her expressive research which manifests itself through the pigments moulding as living material. Already in her earliest

youth experiences, having grown up in Bollenstreek, a sandy area close to the dunes where tulips spread out, she has shown considerable interest in moulding, from the sand of the Dutch west plains to clay sculptures and colour material spread with strength and energy. Once she became aware of her talent and her artistic-creative inclinations, van Haaster undertook her course of cognitive studies that would have been lead to the liberation of the pictorial gesture. It becomes fluid to follow the artist's inner movement, the creative impulse that characterizes her every single work.

Starting from a natural and spatial fact, whose figurative references are lost even though they are found in the titles of the works, she expresses spontaneous and gestural immediacy in her expressive charge made of few colours and where the signs, without direct naturalistic references, become the absolute protagonists of the work as structures of coloured matter. The impulsive gesture is transferred onto the canvas that, from the field of representation, becomes the space of the artist's action. In this way, she transfers her energy into the pictorial material. The full-bodied brushstroke, dynamically laid and poured out, forms excrescences of colours that retain the energy of the creative act. The painting ripples on the canvas as the waves of the sea break on the rocks, forming an incessant and stimulating movement over an emotional and empathic level. This stream of consciousness is what distinguishes the artistic work of van Haaster, who creates paintings in an endless succession. Her painting as a creative and vital act embraces acceleration and deceleration on the canvas, just like life itself, since painting is subordinated to the alternation of vitalistic impulses and moments of absolute stillness.

The oil painting, bearing a cultural and artistic value linked to the Flemish tradition, allows her to work on a malleable surface, given the properties of the oil as a slow-drying binder, on which the artist can intervene several times, reworking the painting in several stages. Her vitalistic painting made of rapid and sudden gestures could clash with this technical choice but, actually, it is a fundamental component of her gesture able to spread the colour through the different qualities and nature of the movement: slow, fast, soft and violent. The dynamism derived from it is the same of the painter, born from her temperament and held back by the colour lying on a horizontal plane to avoid dripping but allowing for solid concretions of colour, witnesses of the spontaneous creative impetus. The expressive value, born from the combined action of the body, mind and feeling of the artist, is accompanied by a great technical ability. This explains the choice of the small format, 35×25 cm, since it contributes to the execution of the work according to a useful and functional control at the technical level to express the whole physical and emotional charge of the artist. Moreover, the reduced format allows her to avoid projects, studies or sketches. This let her follow the inner creative drive that gradually increases and decreases following artist's vital rhythm.



*Zweef*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 40x35cm.

The pencil or watercolour drawings are, therefore, unique and independent works born from the artist's creativity as a sort of break or temporal suspension from painting. In each of them it is possible to trace the same powerful and abstract communicative force of the pictorial sign, capable of evoking an existential condition.

The chromatic relations, the apparently random trend of the sign, the dense and tight weave of the brushstroke are van Haaster's signature which transmits through her gestural sign the visual and tactile tensions produced by the vitality of the overlapping brushstrokes. This overlapping of the colour plans assigns a primary importance to the succession of the painter's actions and, at the same time, it describes a homogeneous spatiality without hierarchies or boundaries. In fact, the colour overflows and enters forcefully into the spectator's visual space. The representation is devoid of a determined direction and the bystander is, therefore,

free to immerse himself in a swirling interweaving of colours and planes, lumps and brushstrokes that reveal how improvisation, although guided by principles of compositional balance, is a founding element of van Haaster's art.



*Lichaam*, 2016-17. Oil on canvas, 40x30cm.

The fragmentation of colour and form are brought together by the harmony of the compositional whole as in the interpenetration of futurist colours where the explosions of light give shape to abstraction. The purist research of colour, highlighted by the choice to use a few colours at a time, two or three as maximum, gives birth to a chromatic syntax made of light and shadow, bright and dark. In the last decade, the painting of van Haaster becomes painting of light such as the Venetian Renaissance painting due to the chromatic choice of blue and yellow, where for her blue indicates the space and yellow the light. For example, in *Lichaam* (2016), she openly declares to have been inspired by the blue of the

Madonna from San Giobbe Altarpiece (1487 c.) by Giovanni Bellini for the central body and by the light arrangement of the yellows of the backdrop.

The succession of the colours and the abstraction of the form obtained via techniques derived from a process of apparent improvisation, give back a spatial image characterized by the materiality of the colour, spread by touch, which causes visual alterations and shading. Hence the chiaroscuro is derived not only by physics and matter but also by syntax due to the linguistic and spatial use of blue and yellow.

The dichotomy derived from spatiality and gesture is what makes Bettie van Haaster an artist with a resolute expressive freedom. She is able to transmit emotions and establish empathic and allusive relationships in those who observe her paintings. Between the fullness and the emptiness of the pigments it is allowed to let one's own imagination travel among the waves of colour until finding that fleeting image blinded by the artist via repeated actions and abstract manipulations. That inner and individual essence of which only Bettie van Haaster is the caretaker.