



Marenne Welten, 2021.

Anneke van Wolfswinkel  
November 19, 2021

## The old men are back in Stedelijk Museum Breda

**For a moment, the residents of the Old Men's Home are back where they lived long ago: Stedelijk Museum Breda. But this time they stem from the imagination of Marenne Welten, in her exhibition 'House of Men'.**

On the day of the interview, 'the men' had not yet been brought to the museum. The almost man-sized paintings are arranged along three walls of the high studio in the house in Middelburg's city center: men in suits, with drooping shoulders, sometimes standing next to an empty chair, sometimes holding a hat. They are old, and they look lost.

For the exhibition 'House of Men', Marenne Welten (1959) studied the history of the building in which the Stedelijk Museum Breda is located. From 1798-1954 the building was an 'old men's home'. Welten's father's family grew up close to the home.

"My aunt is in her 90s and still remembers the men," she says. "As a child she thought they were a bit pathetic. You only ended up there when no one else could or wanted to take care of you. They had become redundant." She shows photos of the dormitory: single beds along the walls, each enclosed by a floral curtain. "That was all they had for themselves."



Marenne Welten, 2021.

She read the strict regulations on alcohol consumption and mandatory footwear, found a letter asking a man to please admit his father, and looked at photos of the old residents and the regents who ran the place. When she had read everything there was to find, she could start painting. But first she put all the archive material away again.

"I wanted to completely tear down the old man's house, and then rebuild it in the imagination." The men she eventually painted are therefore not portraits of existing men. „I connect the history of the old men's home with the storylines of my personal history. What does 'the old man' mean to me?" She tells about her father, who died when she was ten years old. About the men in the family, who sat around the table at parties and spoke, dressed in suits.



Marenne Welten, 2021.

„They ruled the family and as a child I was impressed by them. And it was like that everywhere, even in the art world. My father, who was also an artist, once took me to an opening in the 1960s. I saw a photo of it recently: only men in moody suits, even there. These paintings are also about the passing of that culture.”

The oil paint is thick on the canvases. That has a special reason. Welten: „When I start a painting, I first apply a thick layer of white paint. I will then continue painting in it, which is very difficult. The paint dries slowly and obeys its own laws. This makes it more unpredictable for me what the outcome of the painting will be.



Marenne Welten, 2021.

Compare it to a house: everything is neatly in order at the front door. That's the facade. But I find it more interesting what happens near the back door: it's a mess there, there's everything you'd rather not see. In my work I want to show that messiness, to extract everything that is hidden in myself. Because I make it difficult for myself when painting, I ignore the facade.”

In addition to the series of standing men, there are also four lying, three very large heads, and a number of small works on paper. A mixture of gouache and collage, contained in frames that Welten found in second-hand shops. Hands and eyes, human figures, flowers, beds and here and there a skeleton: universal symbols in deliberately illogical combinations that stimulate the imagination.



Marenne Welten, 2021.

“The exhibition is one whole,” says Welten, “like a novel in which a writer conjures up a fictional world in which the reader is taken along. There are also historical objects on display from the museum collection, such as small reliquaries that people used to carry in their pockets. Everyone can make their own connections between the different images and objects in the exhibition, and make personal memories and associations in them.”

**Marenne Welten, House of Men: Stedelijk Museum Breda, November 20, 2021– May 1, 2022**  
**[stedelijkmuseumbreda.nl](https://stedelijkmuseumbreda.nl)**