

## Jan Dheedene - Monsterfaces

The recent paintings by Jan Dheedene (Kortrijk, b.1979) consist of clear surfaces on a dark background. His palette is mostly black, white and grey. The geometric figures (rectangles and/or squares) remind of the form of the stretcher. They give the paintings a solid character.

Jan Dheedene paints 'grisailles'. Yet there a lot of colour rests in his paintings, especially blue and red. As a motif he exclusively uses static forms. There is also plenty of movement in his compositions. Abstract and geometric in form, the paint handling and structure of touch show lyrical pretences.

Any image is anthropomorphic. However abstract it might be, the eye will always do it's best to see the (human) figure in it. The way we see organic figures in the clouds, we see monstrous masks here. The shining surfaces become openings of eyes, a nose or a mouth. Jan Dheedene calls them *Monsterfaces*.

To explain how these static forms become dynamic we have to get back to the genesis of these paintings. On the Internet a short movie circulates (search for *Very Suspicious* on You Tube) in which Jan Dheedene has the old logo of the *Société Generale Bank* spinning as a spiral to the evocative music that Bernard Herrmann wrote for Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. The form is reminiscent of the *Rotoreliefs* of Marcel Duchamp. In his *Anémic Cinéma* these turning discs are hypnotic. *Vertigo* is the story of inspector Scottie Ferguson who wants to model reality after his own obsessive imagination, until he discovers that reality exceeds his imagination by far and he ends up in a breathtaking spiral.

The logo of the *Société Generale Bank* is a strange but immediately recognizable capital G. Inside angular, outside round. Static as well as dynamic it stands for both progress and permanence. In this period of economic crisis this cartoon tends to be threatening but for Jan Dheedene, who produced it *in tempore non suspecto*, it remains an icon from his childhood, reminiscent of a period of safety and stability.

Jan Dheedene used the same *Société Generale Bank* logo in a series of drawings (conté crayon and graphite) on beer mats, where he literally deconstructs the form to compose new ones with it. This specific support was not chosen because of its superficial connotation of sociability, but because of the handy format and the special texture of the raw material. Yet the original idea comes from the architect Henri Van de Velde who, for the plan of his *Book Tower*, where this series was originally exhibited, departed from equal squares and round angles. The fact that these square forms come with rounded angles was itself an invitation to have them rotate on their axis.

Through many drawings, whereby the logo is analyzed, cut up and re-assembled, the form evolved in a playful way into a series of collages that resulted in an exhibition – *Walks* (2008) - and artist book of the same name. Here the lines and surfaces take the form of routes and territories. The title *Walks* refers both to actual walks (Jan Dheedene is a passionate mountain hiker) and to the walk of the pencil on the limited surface of the predetermined support. Later these drawings were very appropriately used for the Ghent *City Plan Visual Arts*.

Although they lead a life of their own, the drawings are also part of the origin of *Monsterfaces*. According to the artist, who also shows a particular interest in the spatial integration of his work and in modern and contemporary architecture, his *Monsterfaces* can also be seen as house fronts, where one can clearly recognize eyes and mouth in windows and door. As concrete examples he cites the well-known constructions by Alvaro Siza (the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto) or Herzog and de Meuron (Rudin house). If the façade portrays a face, then the house itself can be seen as a body

hidden behind this face. The artist goes on to wonder whether the people living in these houses would be aware of that.

Although these abstract geometric paintings seem simple at first sight, Jan Dheedene's work relies on a real reflection about art in general and painting in particular. The materialization of the problems that he encounters regularly in his inquiry into the essence of the art (of painting) is the issue of his work. These are mainly problems of representation versus autonomy. Problems that translate into the relation between form and content, theory and practice, feeling and knowledge, intuition and logic, image and matter, forms and bodies, light and shadow, figure and background, reminiscence and desire...

His work is anchored in a rich cultural context with a great diversity. As most important sources of inspiration the artist mentions, in addition to Louis Kahn and Alfred Hitchcock, Sonic Youth and Richard Prince. With respect to content and form his work is, amongst others, related to that of Brice Marden, Helmut Federle, Gordon Matta-Clark or René Daniels.

The great diversity of connotations is most visible in the project *Nordlicht*, which he realized within the framework of Bezet (Buda, Kortrijk, 2008). For *Nordlicht* Jan Dheedene produced a temporary painting that was used as a projection screen for an audio-visual work of the Austrian artist Michael Langeder. The *Nordlicht* or polar light (*aurora borealis*) is a physical phenomenon whereby the light in the evening and at night is visible in the form of beams. A phenomenon that gets evoked here in an artificial way through projection or, as the artist calls it, through 'painting with light'. Jan Dheedene used a photograph from a fifties magazine showing a snow landscape with two persons in the foreground. The scene reminds one of both Alfred Hitchcock's cinema and of Caspar David Friedrich's paintings. The title of this joint presentation also refers to a painting by Friedrich that got destroyed in 1945 in the Museum of Berlin. Jan Dheedene's monumental work (three metres by four) was destroyed after its projection. He relates the ephemeral aspect of this painting to the volatility of light. To the extent that the polar light represents the revelation of the divine in the face of death to C.D.Friedrich, Jan Dheedene is more interested in the play of light and shadow, the vibration of colour, the movement of light and, above all, the disappearance and appearance of forms where the configuration can be interpreted in yet another (anthropomorphic) way. This procedure is also found in the drawings on beer mats. For Jan Dheedene it is important that no form is fixed.

Jan Dheedene's work is about observation and interpretation, whereby the relation between the work, the spectator and the space plays an essential role. The 'image', as such, does not exist. Or, as Nietzsche put it, 'there are no facts, just interpretations'. This touches the core of what is, at first sight, a quite disparate *oeuvre*. Interpretation, but in the sense of the French *interprétation*, is used to describe the activity of interpreters as well as of musicians and authors. The work of Jan Dheedene *is* interpretation. It is both translation and execution.

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