

'I am an abstract painter'

About the work of Wannes Lecompte

Art is above all about the artist's relationship with his environment. To clarify his relationship with reality the artist is bound to take a (an artistic) point of view. With painters this occurs literally. The painting is irrevocably the result of the position from which the image was created. Later, the spectator will also determine his position towards the canvas.

In Wannes Lecompte's (b. 1979) painting studio small crosses are marked on the floor. As in the theatre they determine the painter's position in the space. From this position he throws small stones, sopped in paint, at the canvas. By doing so dots are originated. These he connects with colored lines that can be read as a traject. It bridges not only the distance between two dots, but refers also to the distance between stone and canvas, between the painting and the eye of the painter, and between the work of art and the eye of the beholder. In this regard Wannes Lecompte talks not just about connections but also about permutations: the change, displacement, or transposition of the separate elements.

The paintings by Wannes Lecompte are the result of a protocol, a procedure, a method. The artist imposes rules upon himself and then follows them. The actual subject of his paintings lies within execution and the illustration of the protocol. Still, this strategy doesn't exclude coincidence. On the contrary. Coincidence, which in the development of modern art played an important role, grants a certain discretion to his work. The forms created in this way he would call 't h r o w n f o r m s', as we too, dixit Sartre, were thrown into the world.

The painting oeuvre of Wannes Lecompte does not depart from reality, it starts out of art. What he creates is autonomous art. An art that stands on itself. In its materials and its production process, it only refers to itself. It is not an image of reality but constitutes an integral part of it. It does not create an illusion of reality but stands in the middle of it. In the same space, in the same time. The paintings by Wannes Lecompte exist only in the hic and nunc, the here and now.

On the other hand, some patterns look like the registration of an intuitive orchestrated choreography. The lines that bring us from one dot to the other can be read as a floor plan, a map or the score of a (choreographic) movement.

The artist positions himself in respect of the canvas. The painting is determined by the reach of his arms. The canvasses show the limits of his movements, the limitations of his actions, the physical limits of his body.

Wannes Lecompte calls himself an abstract painter. But at the same time he asks himself whether there is such a thing as 'abstract forms'. Two curved lines between two identical points in his paintings will easily suggest the opening of a vase. Just as we see images in the clouds, our eyes always look for recognizable figures. That's why the artist prefers to talk about concrete forms.

In doing so, he situates his work within the tradition of the historical avant-garde. The purpose of concrete arts was the creation of a visible and tangible form that did not exist before....the expression of abstract ideas in material tangible forms.

In his 'Manifesto of the Concrete Art' (1930) Van Doesburg describes an abstract art that is not rooted in the observation of reality and that has no symbolic connections left.

There is nothing more concrete than a line, a colour, a surface.

Sometimes Wannes Lecompte paints with his canvasses rather than with his brushes. The brush gets attached onto the wall and the canvas is rubbed along. By repeating this several times, screens are created. According to Rosalind Krauss the screen announces 'the determined silence of modern art, its hostile attitude towards the literary, the story, the discourse'.

As a prototype of modern art the screen reflects the horizontal and vertical boundaries of the paintings, which are being moved within the surface as an echo of its border.

Another way to escape our figurative eye would be our longing for the decorative. An ornamental motif is a form without meaning. To emphasize the concrete nature of his paintings, Wannes Lecompte paints on tables. Through the concrete medium of the table, he evolves towards the decorative table cloth, which at a later stage would be painted directly on the table.

Wannes Lecompte loves complex forms. His paintings are flat surfaces as well as three dimensional objects. They evolve between possibility and difficulty. They are at the same time thrown and thought of, drawn and painted, figurative and abstract, concrete and referring, objective and subjective, calculated and accidental, decorative and meaningful...they are not univocal.

Lieven Van Den Abeele
23.03.2008