

Press Release:

Koen van den Broek – Out of Space

Opening on April 16, 2008 at 6.00 p.m., the artist will be present.

Exhibition from April 17 to June 14, 2008

Much more than air or sky, the longstanding pictorial subjects of some of western art's finest triumphal moments, 'ground' effectively defines us as beings that partake and literally root in the palpable reality of our earthly home. In his essay, *To Curb One's Enthusiasm* (2007), Dieter Roelstraete asserts that no other painter has dedicated his painting more to this topic of the world as a ground upon which we are standing (and not as a landscape that we are seeing) than the Belgium artist Koen van den Broek.

On April 16 at 6.00 p.m., we are pleased to be presenting our second show with works by Koen van den Broek – *Out of Space*.

In most of his landscape paintings, van den Broek, since his first single exhibition *Borders* 2001 at Jay Jopling's / White Cube in London, show us the world as the daily reality of a pictorial narrator. In fact, his curbs and curves, as well as his cracked and deserted streets all negate subjectivity or narration. Stories cannot be detected *in* or put – by the way of interpretation – *into* the paintings because van den Broek reduces the information given by an image to the bare minimum necessary to recognize it as a landscape. Starting with his own photographs, he approaches painterly abstraction and – at the same time – researches the essential conditions of our visual reception.

For instance, the painting *Hillsboro #2* is – with the exception of the two upper corners – almost totally painted in a bright rosé that receives its rhythm by single grey spots done with a strongly visible brush stroke. What would appear as pure abstract painting is thereby turned into the depiction of a street, an urban space at a very specific moment. Depth is created by a black and a red line that almost merge in the upper half of the painting. The street can also be detected as such by the addition of three horizontal lines that are deciphered as the tar that holds together the cement plates. These elements are sufficient for van den Broek. There are no human beings, no trees, there is no horizon, no sky, no movement – no depiction of time whatsoever. The representation of a particular place is not what interests the artist. Just the limits and possibilities of depicting or representing his dominating motif – the ground on which we are grounded.

In our exhibition, we show for the first time the series *Out of Space*. In the series, Koen van den Broek continues his discourse on painting, however, he does it with a totally new and up to now singular stance. Whereas his works until this point have always been based on his own photographs, in this group of 12 paintings he uses images – stills from unknown films – chosen by John Baldessari, the US-American conceptual artist known also for painting on photographs, as the basis.

While Baldessari's own paintings upon photographs lead to a changing of the narrative and of the content of the image, van den Broek chooses to underline the relation between the representation of reality and painting in his interventions. For instance, he questions the hierarchical structure of the perception of an image by stressing the shadows by painting over them instead of placing the paint on the objects that cast the shadows, that is, the objects that are looked at generally when an image is seen.

In the works exhibited in our show, van den Broek repeats his painterly interventions on the film stills and is thereby mirroring his usual strategy of working with photographic templates. However, whereas up until now he has tried to reduce the information of the photos in his paintings in a way that the paintings almost tended to be an abstract work, in the new works he approaches the border between figuration and abstraction by coming from abstraction.

The independence from the representation gives him the chance to concentrate even more on painting as such. For example, the work *American Image* is based on a film still that shows a table with piles of newspapers on it and a bench covered with clothes standing in front of the table. Over the table hang neon lights. While the viewer normally tries to combine the elements to a story, van den Broek counters this tendency and ignores the significance of the objects by concentrating on their forms. The table, for instance, is seen only as a bright negative form in a black field that defines the space of the painting. Within this form, van den Broek places blue and green fields at locations where before the clothes were seen and – in addition – replaces the neon lamp with a red beam.

This procedure runs counter to the process of recognizing. Colors are no longer functionalized as defining attributes of particular images. The full tones do not represent reality anymore, but instead are chosen following the necessities of the composition. This means that the works of the *Out of Space* series remain abstract even though they allude to the sceneries of our realities. Without the details that lead towards the content of a photograph, the images seem to be vague souvenirs reminding us of a place or a story, which resist full recognition. This resistance to throw light on a story opens up the viewer's understanding for the compositional tension of the work reached by the use of colors. This also allows an understanding of the large topic of the painter Koen van den Broek – the conditions and possibilities of painting.

For more information and/or images of the works please contact the gallery.