
Philipp von Rosen Galerie

Koen van den Broek

Broken Road

January 27 – April 6, 2024

Opening on January 24, 2024, 7-9 pm

Almost eighteen years after our first exhibition *Dante's View*, which Koen van den Broek did with and for us, and almost 25 years after he first appeared in public as a painter in 1999, we are now dedicating the ninth solo exhibition at our gallery to the painter, who was born in Belgium in 1973 and lives near Antwerp.

While van den Broek has taken very intensive steps from exhibition to exhibition, changing his paintings in terms of both form and content and thus changing and expanding his work by stages, something that can be described as a „Continental Shift“ is now taking place. For some months now, he has been creating paintings that are no longer painted in oil on canvas and are not based on photographs of landscapes or zoomed-in details from the street, for example.

The new works that we are showing in *Broken Road* are not images of the world, not representations of a reality seen through the lens of a camera. Thus, we no longer see a graduated reality derived from a second (or rather: third) level, but experience the „world itself“ as it takes place on the canvas. If the term were not used for something else, what we are now seeing could be described as „concrete art“, in the sense that the very concrete materials and colors of the world are applied to the canvas. „Materials and colors of the world“ is to be taken quite literally, because in this fundamental change van den Broek has not only said goodbye to creating images of the world, but also to the material he had used for decades, oil on prepared canvas, an ensemble of means with which he had achieved the greatest precision and virtuosity. Instead, he resorts to paints that he buys in specialist road marking stores, paints that are designed and made for application to road surfaces, paints that cannot be mixed and for which he is therefore reliant on the palette that the road traffic regulations of this world have in store for him. He is thus presented with a selection consisting of the three primary colors, plus green and the non-colors black and white. He also uses tar, a sticky mass that is almost impossible to work with. With these means, he creates legible material spaces that can be understood or better experienced precisely as such – and not as pictures. Thus van den Broek takes a big step towards painterly abstraction derived from his intuition.

Virtuously learning how to handle these materials in the context of painting and developing skill is simply not possible. In fact, Koen van den Broek himself describes it as „rough“ to work with these materials. He fights against them and forces them in the direction he plans and envisions. But every picture is an accident, shaped by chance and physical forces – like a snapshot in photography, only partially controllable at best and accordingly incorporating the unexpected. van den Broek compares this to works by Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein or Hans Hartung and describes that in the end it is about how he can intervene in the current events of the material on the canvas. Incidentally, unlike in the past, this process takes place horizontally for practical reasons, with the canvas lying on the floor and repeatedly using a machine like the ones used to apply stripes to roads.

It is fascinating that despite the radical approach to the material, elements familiar from van den Broek's previous works have been retained: the curb that runs diagonally, as a curve or vertically through the picture, or the cracks in the road surface. The titles, too, are still related to the titles of earlier works (for example *Firmeny* or *Broken Road* or *South Park*). In this regard – despite all the changes – there is also recognizability.

Art history has always been of great importance to Koen van den Broek. Not in order to measure himself against the artists he uses as references or to establish or overthrow hierarchies, but rather to anchor himself on a theoretical and practical level and to seek intellectual and practical proximity and distance in the debate. In view of his new works, he himself thinks of Helen Frankenthaler and her so-called *Stained Canvases*, in which paint material and canvas became an inseparable unit (instead of creating an image on the canvas with paint). But he also thinks of Barnett Newman and his reductions to stripes and color fields (and accordingly titles one of his larger canvases

Stations Orange) or – in view of the *Broken Road*-paintings with the cracks in the road surface – of Jackson Pollock and his *Drippings*, for which Pollock also did not mix colors, but poured them from his buckets with a hole in the bottom onto the canvas and thus laid them on top of each other in layers.

For several years now, Koen van den Broek has had a studio on the South Korean island of Jeju. He spent a few weeks there in the summer of 2023 and used the time to decide to take the radical step that followed. The fact that the very extensive monograph by British art critic John Welchman (professor at the University of California) was about to be completed and published last summer certainly contributed to this. A 528-page monograph that describes, analyzes and classifies van den Broek's development from his beginnings to (almost) today in terms of art history. The planning for his first institutional solo exhibition in Germany at the Kunstmuseum Magdeburg was also completed. This exhibition can be seen in Magdeburg until February 4 and will then be shown in a slightly different form at the Ludwig Museum in Koblenz from February 24 (until the end of April 2024).

It fills us with great joy and pride that we are able to present the first ever solo exhibition that shows and provides access to works from this new phase of Koen van Broek's oeuvre!

If you have any further questions or would like to receive images, please contact the gallery.