

A text by Miriam van Ommeren.

Just Quist makes artworks that occur as paintings. The flat surface is an arena in which the challenge, with its limitations, is taken on. In his works Quist questions the painterly. Characteristics of traditional painting are kept at a distance: The artist's signature is absent; there is no pronounced touch. He is suspicious towards optical effects, they are suggestive and can refer to something that happens outside of the actual canvas.

Here, the control of the medium stays in the hands of the artist, he decides the depth and sets the rhythm, not letting his emotions take the upper hand. The sentiment is constantly questioned. This makes for an autonomous painting with its integrity intact. The viewer subsequently gets total freedom in observation and interpretation.

Figuration is virtually nonexistent in Quist's work. In one sole piece he shows seemingly expressionist paint strokes, enclosed by a stark frame. The contrasting color fields especially give the work a suprematistic feel. No suggestion of space is made through layering, there is no building. The different fields of color lie side by side, delineated with tape and seamlessly colored with roller or spray can. The depth comes from the painting itself, not from the materiality. The materials and techniques Quist uses decree the content, in that order. Oil paint is reduced to a minimum, to make the flat surface as flat as possible. This constraint of structure does not decrease the materiality, but the depth in the work is reduced to mere millimeters.

The use of glass and mirrors catches the eye and breaks the conventions of painting. In traditional painting the mirror was not only the creator of spatiality, but also had the role of messenger of the truth. Quist does not strive to have his work explained, he rather retorts the beholders onto themselves, and does so successfully with this medium. Fragments of glass and mirror here take the place of both carrier and medium, and offer the viewer different degrees of reflection. Thus a two-dimensional carrier gets depth: The third dimension that is turned outward.

Viewing this works the viewer is forced to interact; with the piece, with himself and with the setting in which both exist. An example of this can be found in 'Untitled' (2011). The black mirror-surface, interrupted only by a few neutral corners, has a strong presence but seems impenetrable to the viewer. It literally forces the viewer to interact with its surroundings, seeking a refuge in the work alone is impossible.

Quist is attracted to the duality of glass; because of its transparency the material is both present and absent. Through sandblasting he removes layer after layer, like a sculptor hacking at stone until the sculpture reveals itself. In 'Parcae' (2012) this technique leads to the disclosure of a reused older image, more figurative than in his current works, that presents itself to the patient viewer in a geometrical frame. The tendency to look through the glass is made harder and the piece behaves like a hologram, presenting ever-changing dimensions to the viewer.

A remarkable work is 'A very rare image on the net' (2012), based on Francis Picabia's 'Très rare tableau sur la terre' (1915), on of Picabia's first 'machine paintings'. In 'A very rare image on the net' one also finds a third dimension. The underlying structure, inspired by an unfolded piece of paper,

catches light on various planes and contrasts with the rhythm of the perpendicularly placed slim tubes. Although this work has undeniable optical depth it is a photograph printed on canvas and thus literally the flattest piece of the show.

For Quist's work an important point of departure is to discover the compositional behavior of his work. How does a shape work, and what happens if this shape is released in the work and has to relate to other works, other shapes? Quist feels that the idea that art ends at the physical artwork is outdated. He likes to refer to critic David Joselit's famous essay 'Painting beside itself' (2009). In this work Joselit cites Martin Kippenberger: 'When you say art, then everything possible belongs to it. In a gallery that is also the floor, the architecture, the color of the walls'. According to Joselit art lives in a network, but how does the artwork relate to that network?

The exhibition 'Back and Forth' finds its place in Kunst Rotterdam Noord, the former train station in the north of Rotterdam. The space has more glass than walls, a blessing in disguise. It forces Quist to choose building this network in a less conventional way, he has no white cube at his disposal. Within the network named 'Back and Forth' the pieces are, more than usual, surrendered to the outside world: to sunlight, moonlight and the glances of passing commuters. The transparency of the space is echoed between Quist's transparent works and his opaque canvases. He does not hesitate to let work and setting form connections, like a framed canvas, 'Untitled' (2012), next to a windowpane, or a transparent work, 'Untitled' (2012), that nearly disappears against the white wall against which it is placed.

Thus Quist's network gets a holistic nature, where art and environment are in a continuous dialogue. The now course he is looking for in his development as an artist, this 'new, meaningless space' can be found anywhere. His work legitimizes itself in the context in which it arises. The network 'Back and Forth' is in this way a showcase of Quist's capacity to be an artist open to his environment, both literally and figuratively, and to not let his art end at the edge of his canvas.

Miriam van Ommeren 2012

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