

INTERVIEW

WITH AR[T]MOIRE MAGAZINE

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BAS NIJENHUIS

"A work of art is fascination or love frozen in matter."

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Our next guest (born 1976) is a professional artist living in Groningen, the Netherlands. He creates figurative art, mostly oil paintings. Before becoming an artist, he studied and worked as a psychologist. Bas' art allows us to give free rein to our own imagination. His art is capable of enveloping us in a world between what is and what is not. It is becoming entranced in a moment where you can see how each subtle brushstroke has many stories to tell and somehow you are able to witness them all at once. His art acts as a portal that allow us to enter a realm of many stories, each deserving of our attention. As a whole his works of art have a unique freedom to them that simply leave you longing for more.

His figurative work is mainly about tonality, the psyche or human condition, the paint application itself and sometimes decorative aspects. Most often he chooses subjects that have a liveliness to them or are alive. He finds it important to search for the abstract within reality. His work could be called somewhat impressionistic, but not quite. One of Nijenhuis' favourite artists is Antonio Mancini who also had a distinctive paint application- and abstract core, yet his paintings still reflect the real world.

Bas's work has been selected for Dutch events like the Dutch portrait award 2017 and in 2019 the work: 'Girl Without Pearl Earring' has been selected for the BP Portrait Award in London. Just recently he was on national television in a show where a famous Dutch person was painted by three artists. This person, Maarten van Rossem (historian and tv personality) chose Nijenhuis' painting.

What role does the artist have in society?

I think artists have one foot in society and the other is more on the outside. I see them as observers from the edge of society. Artists should have the freedom to paint and depict what they want or what they perceive. This freedom is key to making art. Most artists create something that is reflective of society as it is. However, it is a very personal reflection and one that creates a non-verbal account of the world around us. In this regard art may function as a mirror of sorts offering a different perspective. As a byproduct art is also a visual way to document history.

As a child, what did you wish to become when you grew up?

In Dutch this is called 'boswachter' a forester I believe in English. Roaming free in the woods seemed fun. There are not a lot of woods left nowadays so I seek my freedom elsewhere.

Do you remember the first art you made? What was it and how old were you?

Not really, what is art? I draw -or scratched- from an early age. But is that art? I don't think so. The true question is when becomes something art?

How and when did you first become seriously interested in art?

After I decided to apply for the academy. Before that it was just for fun and I didn't give it too much consideration. This decision changed that and I started to draw a lot. This was in 2009.

Tell us about your particular style and how you came to it?

It evolved from just painting. Also studying and copying the artists I love helped in this regard. But you cannot be a mere copying machine of another artist. That would be rather boring as well. There seem to be a fairly large number of Rembrandt paint-a-like's. There is only one Rembrandt as there is only one 'me' or 'you'. I aim to become the best 'me'-painter in my own way. But of course, as an artist you should use (and steal) techniques from artist before you. This is part of the heritage.

How do you visualize the textures of your work?

I don't visualise an end result. I think about what would contribute to an interesting surface or texture. So in that way I layer paint or put texture to the painting surface that I expect will express something. Usually this works in a way (or I make it work in several steps).

What does your art aim to express?

It expresses my interest or love that I see in my subject when looking at it. When I paint something I usually do not paint the subject perse. It is much more the personalisation of me experiencing the subject. In that regard, the aim is to express fascination and love.

What personality trait has gotten you in the most trouble?

Wanting to paint beautifully or to paint to show that I can paint well. This was more present when I started than it is now. Now I find more beauty in the rough or more boldly stated brushstroke. Just paint what I see and that's it. It gives a sort of perfect imperfection. Trying to paint beautifully doesn't work, just paint, and that in itself is plenty beautiful. Painting is a means not an end in itself. Although, I can really enjoy looking at paintings painted well.

What have you had to sacrifice for this career?

Not so much. Restricting my work as a psychologist gave me more time, less money and more richness.

Who are your biggest influences? Are you inspired by the work of your peers or anyone else in particular?

I love Andrew Wyeth and Antonio Mancini the most currently. In their works I can feel they really liked to paint what they saw. And the compositions, colors and paint handling are superb.

Is the artistic life lonely? What do you do to counteract it?

Sometimes it can be. I share my atelier. It is nice to discuss art in general or the works we are making. I also give painting lessons and meet other creatives this way.

Apart from art, what do you love doing?

I like to cook and eat nice foods, sleeping is also nice and I like the fact that I am alive.

What is your philosophy in matters of art?

Art is all about freedom of expression.

What does 'success' mean to you?

If my work invokes a reaction or an emotion with others that is one thing. I paint the things I am fascinated with or that I love. I hope others can sense this. Success is also becoming the best painter that I can be. The better I become, the better I can express myself. If my art is recognised in this regard then I am on the right track!

What are the biggest things you've learned in life thus far?

Pursue that which you love: fail a thousand times and get up a thousand times.

What's the best piece of advice you've been given, and by who?

Whenever looking at your artwork: you have 'to see yourself' in it. This was advice given from a teacher of mine: Ruud de Rode. It is quite an abstract notion.

What advice would you give to the next generation?

We are all one generation don't you think?

*revised for clarity on 1-6-2023