

# EUROPAEISCHE WERTE

STIJN PEETERS



AUGUST 27 - OCTOBER 8, 2016

SF: Dear Stijn, your solo show at **DAS ESSZIMMER** has the title *Europäische Werte* (engl.: European Values), which in combination with the image of the invitation card – a child, presumptively one that came with its parents to ask for asylum, seems to be quiet provocative. – Is it your intention to provoke?

SP: What is provocative when you are just presenting the facts? Of course it's heartbreaking to acknowledge the fact that although the war in Syria is in its fifth year, our own elected politicians pretended to be surprised by the spillover of the war finally reaching European shores. They could have seen it coming and they should have. Instead they chose to act surprised and gave nationalist and racist politics all over Europe the opportunity to cash in on this humanitarian crisis. – I should make an exception because the attitude (based on historical consciousness), of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel was exceptional, and although she will bear the brunt for being honest by future elections, she at least tried to show some kind of statesmanship.

The Greek Euro-crisis showed that Europe is not a union, that private interests are being pursued and an ideology of the necessity of a real European Union has eroded to a point of total collapse. I'm no politician but I would very much welcome more ideology and less pragmatism. I would like to see more focus on humanistic values instead of accountancy and monetary politics that in my view only benefits the people who are going to destroy the future for the coming generations. *Wir schaffen das* was not a hollow message, we could have regulated this humanitarian crisis by responsible behaviour of our elected officials and it will prove to be a historical failure. The whole Mediterranean will become a site of conflict, and we in the North can comfortably say: „well, we're high and dry and the Southern temperament has always caused trouble, as long as we are sure of a return on our investments it's not our business".

The United States could have refused to re-vitalise the war-ridden continent in the 1940's, because geographically they were far away from our borders. But Europe, the European Union will not be able to continue the policy of open borders like it was presented in the 80s. Europe will need responsible statesmanship and a common ideology besides a neo-liberal market ideology to survive.

SF: I totally agree with you in each single word and phrase! And at the same time I notice that there is not only in politics but also within art a huge lack of outspoken and critical positions, at least if you measure that on what is mostly on display in exhibitions, galleries and fairs. Therefore I am wondering if (visual) art is still the mirror of society it was thought to be, but maybe this is an awfully romantic point of view...

SP: It's a hard question to answer and that's because I'm distracted by your use of the word romantic. My mind takes wrong turns, gets lost in associative labyrinths and dead-ends. I think there is still a lot of romantic art being made today by *geniuses*, big men and women who share their wisdom, eccentricity or uniqueness with us, the audience, and whose work is sold for unhealthy prices.

In the 19th century the fine arts, theatre and literature had a role in the public debate that cannot be revived. The arts are marginalized and it would take another discussion to find out if we, as a group, have placed ourselves outside society or that society simply has no more use for us, our slow thoughts, our doubts and questions. In that sense, my approach, my ambition to address themes that I think of importance in my art, can be seen as stubbornly refusing to accept the inevitable. The wish by making a painting or two to address an unknown audience can be called childish, immature, useless, pointless and even romantic. But I choose to disagree.



exhibition view: original drawings Ezel #3

SF: I'm impressed by artists like Theaster Gates or Thomas Hirschhorn who work in a direct contact with groups of people, to engage themselves in bettering their position, to educate, to build where before there was only demolition. Sometimes I envy them, but I have to accept that I'm a very slow thinker; I need the solitude of my studio, to work with my hands and material over a longer stretch of time while considering how to visualize my anger, my grief, how to deal with huge feelings of inadequacy and not seeing a solution.

SF: Your works in the exhibition, the linocuts as well as the large paintings, depict scenes of obvious and/or assumed violence and destruction combined with a daily life atmosphere. Creating images of disturbance and familiarity at the same time.

SP: I'm very much interested in the complexity of life. When I was young I tended to be idealistic, of course, like every conscious young person, I had a politically left inclination. The differences between good and bad, right or wrong were very clear then. I'm glad to say that I have not gotten cynical over the years, although I have had my share of disillusion about the way politics have moved away from ideals, in that sense I suppose I've finally grown up. But what I value is the goodness of people, the social aptitude of making do with life, the good and the bad. So I really focus on the people, who live responsible lives who raise children, take care for parents, family, friends and neighbours. I need good people in my work for balance, because the greed, the fact-free politics, the demolition of social structures, the verbal warmongers, the absolute irresponsibility of certain powerful people and all the excesses of our time make me very, very angry.

Phillip van den Bossche, at that time curator at the van Abbemuseum, told me that my series of 73 linocuts made him think of a chronicle. And I suppose that is what I try to

give my view on the time I live in through a combination of images. To create history as I experience it.

SF: A chronicle, revealing private issues of you as an artist and individual as well as more global themes, might also be the right term for your publication project EZEL, that you started some years ago and of which publication number 5 just got finished (October 2016).

What was the initial idea behind this project and how does it relate to your body of work?

SP: For me, Ezel functions as an autobiographical project, through which I want to provide insight into an artist's life, a life in which professional experiences mix in an organic way with daily routines. Where activities in the studio are as valuable as childcare, family visits, cleaning, shopping, teaching and providing. Art and everyday life are not

opposed, they can function perfectly alongside each other. I really hate it when people want to disconnect art and life because it creates an atmosphere of art being superfluous, something that a society can do without. It has never been that way and it will never be so. I really like the adventure of not knowing what your work will look like in a couple of years, what the work will be about, who the people are you will get to know, where you will show your new works, where the next studio will be. Insecurity for some, richness for me.

It's also a celebration of analogue archives, that's why I chose to copy original documents like letters and notes by drawing them, to lift them up unto the same level that the writing and the original drawings in the issues have. And another, admittedly more vain, motive is my intention to create the environment in which my artworks were made, the thoughts and motives I had during the process. Building my own art history.

By making issues of 32 pages wherein I write and draw

exhibition view: *Chios-Idomeni 1824-2016*, 2016 | acrylic on canvas, 300 x 325 cm





exhibition view: *Grande machine #2*, 2003, oil- and acrylic on canvas, 300 x 325 cm

about certain periods in my life, let's say from 1992 till 1994, I have to think really hard what is essential for me to tell about those years. So I construct my own history and from reactions of my followers I also tell part of their stories. They recognize their own formative years. In these 32 pages I cannot give the whole story, I have to choose what I want in and what has to stay out, sometimes it's not even a question of essential information but the development as such. It has to start at a certain point and then nearing the 30th page it has to stop and be as complete as possible. Page 31 gives a hint about the next issue and 32 tells in short about the contents of the magazine/artists book.

SF: So EZEL for you is also a way of reflection on your life and your art work?

SP: Yes it is

SF: ...and why is the Publication called EZEL?

SP: It's the Dutch word for donkey and I use it as a nickname. It has a lot of possible meanings. First you have the animal. The common assumption is that the donkey is stubborn and I can totally identify with that, you cannot be an artist for over 30 years and not be stubborn. You need it to tackle problems and disappointment. In Shakespeare's *Midsummer Nights' dream*, the donkey or ass stands for stupidity and the donkey-cap is used in all kinds of cultures to shame and punish people. But a jester can associate and work with stupidity as a material. Also the donkey is a hard worker and can go on for a very long time, a beast of burden that can carry a lot of stuff on its back. It was also the animal that carried Jesus Christ on his entrance in Jerusalem. Humble is also something I like about it, definitely not a Lippizaner show-horse. Well I could go on about the animal. The other meaning of the word Ezel in Dutch is easel, the piece of furniture in a painter's studio which



exhibition view: *Lino's 2003-2005*, 73 linocuts





exhibition view (from left to right): original drawings *Ezel #3* and *Grande machine #2*, 2003, oil- and acrylic on canvas, 300 x 325 cm

carries the canvas.

SF: The large paintings in the exhibition immediately evoke images and references to old masters like Goya or Velazquez, names that frequently were dropped by the visitors. How much are these painters and their work references for you?

SP: I look at paintings all the time, that's how I learned how to paint. In art school I studied illustration and my most dominant teacher forbade me to go to the more autonomous section of painting. I was not stubborn enough at that time so I stayed on and kept drawing and lettering. After my graduation I bought Doerner's book on painting-technique and learned by experimenting and trying to learn the tricks of the trade by looking closely at paintings. I visited the Rijksmuseum and other museums in the Netherlands

and abroad, kept notebooks and read a lot of books, art historical but also biographies and novels. I really like the idea of continuity, that my hand makes the same movements as the hands of the great masters and I feel very humbled by their excellence and craftsmanship. Of course I can never reach their masterly handling of paint, composition schemes, but I try and work very hard. I'm especially interested in 19th century history painting, but for my praxis I enjoy all kinds of art forms. It's a world in which I am very happy. And if I would make a list it would go on for page after page.

(The two paintings in the show were inspired by Delacroix, the most recent canvas hinted at Goya and Manet's appropriation of the anonymous group of military in his execution of emperor Maximilian)

SF: You mentioned your great interest in 19th century history painting, an approach which essentially does not seem to exist anymore – what I only realized after becoming famili-





exhibition view: *linocut*, 100 x 140 cm (left) and *Arabesque*, etching painted over; 100 x 150 cm (right)

ar with your work. What is it in particular that draws your attention to this genre of painting?

SP: The ambition of the works to (co-)create history, the self-assurance that the works were part of and could cause a *discours*, that they were in the center of the public eye. It is incomparable to the present day where the arts have to operate in all kinds of *niches* and have no appeal anymore to a large audience.

The power of televised and digital media has brought about an acceleration of news and imagery, and the mix of money and media creates news that has a certain popular appeal. Themes are being milked as long as there's attention, clogging up the channels in a way that the other actuality in the world has no platform anymore. That is why all sorts of activism and emancipatory themes have found a last stage in the artworld. In my opinion that is one of the reasons for the uneasy relationship between politicians

and the arts. As I have mentioned before, I would like to research the possibility of addressing actuality and still use traditional artistic materials and working methods. One reason for this is the *slowness* of the media I use, because of the time invested in researching, the process and the realization of the work you organically move into a different mode of thinking, it becomes more reflective and less charged with immediacy.

#### Academic formation

1978 – 82 Koninklijke Academie voor Kunst en vormgeving 's Hertogenbosch

1985 - 87 Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht

#### Solo exhibitions (selection)

2016 *Europaeische Werte*, Das Esszimmer – Raum für Kunst<sup>+</sup>, Bonn (GER)

2014 Heden, den Haag (NL)

2012 Drawing Centre Diepenheim (NL)

2011 *Kom je in mijn schilderij?*, Museum van Bommel van Dam, Venlo (NL)

2009 *Stijn says hey*, stedelijk van Abbe-Museum Eindhoven (NL)

2008 Livingstone Gallery, Den Haag (NL)

2007 Mannendans, Galerie Willy Schoots Eindhoven (NL)

*Art Amsterdam*, Galerie Josine Bokhoven, Amsterdam (NL)

2006 *Lino's 2003-2005*, van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (NL)

Galerie Josine Bokhoven, Amsterdam (NL)

2004 *Beeld van ik en jij*, Galerie Willy Schoots, Eindhoven (NL)

2003 *Beeld van ik en jij*, Museum van Bommel – van Dam, Venlo (NL)

2002 Galerie Helga Hofman, Alphen aan den Rijn (NL)

1998 Galerie Oele, Amsterdam (NL)

1995 Galerie Oele, Amsterdam, (NL)

1992 *Philip Morrisprijs*, Stadsgalerij Heerlen (NL)

Galerie van Esch, Eindhoven (NL)

1991 Kunstverein Region Heinsberg (GER)

1990 *Impulse 10*, Galerie Löhr am Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach (GER)

#### Group exhibitions (selection)

2016 *Animali*, with Arno Kramer en Bram Hermens, Van Abbehuis, Eindhoven (NL)

*The Times they are a changing*, Park, Tilburg (NL)

2015 *Zomerzucht en Andere Verhalen*, TAC, Eindhoven (NL)

*Im Inneren der Stadt*, Studienzentrum für Künstlerpublikationen, Bremen (GER)

2014 *Paint it*, Galerie Witteveen, Amsterdam (NL)

Rijnstate Ziekenhuis, Arnhem (NL)

2013 ReRotterdam (NL)

*Pictura Dordrecht* (NL), with Peter Kantelberg and Tom de Groot

*In Kriteike Staat*, Kunstenlab, Deventer (NL)

Galerie Helder, Den Haag (NL), with Tim Breukers

2012 *Podium DAK*, Geldrop (NL), organized by Galerie Wilms, Venlo (NL)

ReRotterdam (NL)

*Going to the etch*, Teekengenootschap Pictura, Dordrecht (NL)

2011 *All about Drawing*, Stedelijk Museum Schiedam (NL)

*Touchscreen*, with Anouk Bax, Van Bommel van Dam (NL)

*Brabant Nu 2011*, Museum de Pont, Tilburg (NL)

*Even schilderen*, de Fabriek, Eindhoven (NL)

2010 *Mirror*, Galerie 48, Breda (NL)

2009 *Eindhoven-prints-New York*, Manhattan Graphic Center, New York (USA)

2008 *Delight*, Arti & Amecitiae, Amsterdam (NL)

2006 *Gastateliers*, Grafisch atelier Daglicht/ Beeldenstorm, Eindhoven (NL)

2005 *Fresco*, de Fabriek, Eindhoven (NL)

2004 CBK, Alphen aan den Rijn (NL), with Eva Schwab

Livingstone Gallery, den Haag (NL)

*Artcologne*, Galerie Willy Schoots, Köln (GER)

2002 *Artcologne*, Galerie Willy Schoots, Keulen, Köln (GER)

*Master Painting*, Galerie Michael Schultz, Berlin (GER)

2001 *KunstRAI*, Galerie Willy Schoots, Amsterdam (NL)

*Artcologne*, Galerie Willy Schoots, Keulen, Köln (GER)

2000 *Sterrenbrood*, Galerie Willy Schoots, Eindhoven (NL)

*KunstRAI*, Galerie Oele, Amsterdam (NL)

*Artcologne*, Galerie Willy Schoots, Keulen, Köln (GER)

1998 *Alles op een dag*, Gemeentelijk Museum Jan Cunen, Oss (NL)

1997 *Zomergasten*, Noordbrabants Museum, 's Hertogenbosch (NL)

1993 *10 Jahre Impulse*, Galerie Löhr am Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach (GER)

*Going Dutch*, Värmlands Museum, Karlstad (S)

1989 *Brabant – Biënale*, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (NL)

#### Collections

Museum van Bommel van Dam, Venlo (NL) | van Abbe Museum Eindhoven (NL)

| Museum Jan Cunen, Oss (NL) | NoordBrabants Museum 's Hertogenbosch

(NL) | Heden den Haag (NL) | SNS | ING | ABN Amro | Aegon | private colle-

ctions

#### Catalogues

Catalogus Brabant – Biënale (NL)

*Impulse 10*, Galerie Löhr am Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach (GER)

Catalogus Kunstverein Region Heinsberg (GER)

Catalogus *Other Voices, other Rooms* Noordbrabantse Kunststichting (NL)

*Echo*, Stadsgalerij Heerlen en Philip Morris (NL)

*Going Dutch*, Värmlands Museum en Gemeentelijk Museum Jan Cunen (NL)

*Dialogo Interieur*, Stijn Peeters en Galerie Oele, Amsterdam (NL)

*Quoting Caravaggio, contemporary art preposterous history*, Mieke Bal, University of

Chicago Press

*Sterrenbrood*, Galerie Willy Schoots, Eindhoven (NL)

*Choices*, Galerie Willy Schoots, Eindhoven (NL)

Catalogus Galerie Helga Hofman, Livingstone Gallery en Galerie Willy Schoots

*Beeld van ik en jij*, Catalogus Museum van Bommel – van Dam, Venlo (NL)

*Gastateliers*, grafisch atelier Daglicht/ Beeldenstorm

*Stijn says Hey*, dvd

*All about Drawing*, catalogus Stedelijk Museum Schiedam (NL)

*Even Schilderen*, catalogus de Fabriek, Eindhoven (NL)

Drawing Center Diepenheim, tekencahier 10

*Einde*, van Lokaal 01, Breda (NL)

Ezel 1-5

*A Brotherhood of Affection*, Enschede (NL)

*10.000*, booklet accompanying the exhibition *Europaeische Werte*,

**DAS ESSZIMMER**, Bonn (GER)



exhibition view: *Chios-Idomeni 1824-2016, 2016* | acrylic on canvas, 300 x 325 cm (left) and *linocut, 100 x 140 cm* (right)

*front:*

exhibition view: *Arabesque, etching painted over, 100 x 150 cm*

*back:*

exhibition view: *Lino's 2003-2005 (detail), 73 linocuts*

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