

‘Bildübersetzung’



**Els Nouwen, ‘Taste’ (55 x 75 cm, foreground painting), 2009.
Courtesy of Ruimte Morguen**

Passers by of the windows of ‘Ruimte Morguen’ look startled. Photo-realistic paintings are on display. But they are violated by wide brutish brush strokes and spattered paint lines. It is the first time that Els Nouwen (1968, Bree) exhibits her work, but she nonetheless makes a strong statement.

For ten years she collected an extensive archive of photo-material. She chose images that are banal or subtly loaded with meaning, yet with frequent references to art history. First she paints a photo-realistic interpretation using oil on canvas. She builds every layer using a different style and with a different methodology. Between each layer she pauses for periods of reflection. By structuring her work in this manner, Nouwen seeks to create depth on the two dimensional surface. Her use of paint varies between the very controlled to the unstructured. In the upper paint layer we see the transition between image and symbolism/signs by means of the deconstruction of the photo-realistic painted image with aggressive strokes of paint. This method of working is repeated for each painting, but in each, in a different manner.

In the first room you find paintings of an earnest character with references to film and photography. These paintings display collages of images which may overlap one another and where the paint layers merge together, sometimes obscuring the underlying realism.

In the second room Nouwen's choice of photo-images refer more to the history of painting. The over-painting is less violent and more subtle, it creates a humorous or ironic tone.

Nouwen is interested in how we look at images, she likes to demonstrate the risk of making a quick interpretation. The initial literalness of her photorealism together with the radical paint handling breaks the sense of a 'safe' image. It is however not only by means of her raw handling of the photo-realistic layers that the effect is created, but also with the use of sharp colours against the softer tones of the underlying image. The fore- and back-ground of the whole threaten to fall apart and do violence to the painting. Out of this a dissonance arises because of her melding of irreconcilable viewpoints. The resulting creation is fierce and energetic, but also confusing and uncomfortable. Nouwen understands our problematic relationship with images and displays this in a striking manner.

Text by: Indra Devriendt

'Bildübersetzung' until the 13th of June in Ruimte Morguen, Waalsekaai 21-22, Antwerp.
Open Thursday to Saturday from 1400 to 1800. www.antwerpart.be

Translation: David Kennedy. 2010-12-1.