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BENDT EYCKERMANS: Flemish Fantasy

words by Jeppe Ugelvig

Bendt Eyckermans lives and works in the same studio in Antwerp where his father and grandfather made art before him. The historic Flemish capital, abundant in trade as well as art history, serves not only as the production context for the twenty-five-year-old painter, but also as an essential theme and leitmotif in his work. His figurative paintings depict scenes from the artist's everyday movement through the city streets, rendered in a dramatized manner that evokes dream or fantasy.

Eyckermans studied painting in Antwerp, where he received what he himself calls a "classical" education, with an emphasis on form, technique and color. But while his teachers tried to guide him towards the colorful abstraction of Walter Swennen and Tal R, he discovered possibilities and freedom in figuration. He soon became obsessed with the Belgian history of painting, particularly the early 20th-century Latem School, and the work of Constant Permeke. The clunky, adumbral motifs of the Flemish expressionist is evoked clearly in works such as *A whisper* and *But my soul floats* (both 2018), where human figures are caught in awkward bodily gestures dramatized by strong shadows. "I wanted my work to be influenced by the Belgian cultural heritage and to be as Belgian as possible," he explains, suggesting an almost art historical query at work in his paintings. *A lover's sight* (2018), where an arrangement of modernist sculptures are rendered with romantic animism, underlines this directly, as historical artifacts become alive and imbued with a sense of contemporary spirit. Painting on roughly woven canvas, allowing thin darks and thick lights, he procures an almost bas-relief materiality in his works, which only adds to their feel of being both in and out of present-day time.

The narrative ambiguity of Eyckermans' paintings is contrasted by their quotidian nature and straightforward motifs, mostly depicting everyday scenes from the painter's own life. All of his characters are friends, who he frequently asks to pose in a certain stance, alone or with others. "I use painting as a medium to process certain events in my life, and the works are always personal and intimistic," he explains. A reflection in a make-up mirror (*A wild strawberry*, 2018); a body getting up (*A stranger's hand*, 2018); picking up dropped keys (*He stumbles*, 2018): no scene or motif is too minuscule or insignificant in Eyckermans' painterly world. "Sometimes certain gestures, movements or a look of a friend can trigger me into a painting. I don't want to add any text to every painting to give it deep meaning, because most of the time the explanation is quite simple." Oddly cropped, or caught from a weird angle, Eyckermans' paintings can resemble zoomed-in phone snaps or stills from a film, furthered also by his dramatic use of light. As narrative gives way to composition, color and dramatized figurative form, Eyckermans' works borders to the cinematic, which he welcomes as one origin of his work. "One of the reasons why I chose to practice painting is because I read a lot about all these famous movie directors, whom I admired, that they also began with an interest for painting," he explains. "So I thought that painting would be a good step before starting education in making film. I quickly discovered that with painting I can have control over everything and I don't have to compromise with anyone else." At Carlos/Ishikawa in London this May, Eyckermans will show a new body of work depicting "series of events in around my studio," digging deeper into the art historical mythologies that feel latent in his local environment. **K**



BENT EYCKERMANS (BELGIAN, B. 1994, LIVES AND WORKS IN ANWERP) WILL OPEN HIS FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION AT CARLOS/ISHIKAWA, LONDON, IN MAY 2019. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CARLOS/ISHIKAWA