

## ANNIE GENTILS GALLERY

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### Marc Vanderleenen - Priming - Telkens Opnieuw - 2017

With 'Priming', Marc Vanderleenen (Mechelen, 1952) exhibits for the third time at the Annie Gentils Gallery in Antwerp. "The work of someone like Luc Tuymans is well known and is in part present in our memory whenever he shows new work", Vanderleenen says. "Yet most painters are not that renowned and have to start every exhibition anew. That is why my title (Telkens Opnieuw) refers to the creation of an under-layer, to starting all over again. Over and over again."

Marc Vanderleenen had a major exhibition at De Garage in Mechelen in the autumn of 2014. Walter Swennen bought one of his works on that occasion. But except for an article in (H)art, there was hardly any attention from the press. Which is quite frustrating, the artist remarks. Yet it does not prevent him from further developing his idiosyncratic oeuvre, which has only the faded colours and thin application of paint in common with contemporaries like Luc Tuymans, Bert De Beul, and Guy Van Bossche. Vanderleenen's work is a true reflection on the medium of painting yet simultaneously evinces both melancholy and Weltschmerz. Despite the (false) awkwardness with which it appears to be painted, it is closely in line with classical painting. Cézanne, Ensor, Picasso are points of reference in a series of mostly small paintings ("I have a small studio, that's why") which Vanderleenen plans to show in the gallery and which he quickly presents to me in an empty spot on the wall of his studio.

Among them a whole series of works inspired by Cézanne's famous Bathers. "Sometimes I circle around a theme like a photographer around his model," he says. The pink of the bathers is hard to discern in the pale green brushstrokes to which Vanderleenen has reduced Cézanne's trees and shrubs. For he does not paint reality; in the act of painting he reflects on the art of painting - a discipline that was long repressed throughout his career and subsequently all too unilaterally reduced to one particular painting practice.

As such, in his work, Vanderleenen accomplishes two things at once: painting and undermining classical representation. This kind of duality is essential to his oeuvre. His probably best-known painting depicts a walking man with a briefcase and two text balloons: the one in front of him says 'Too late' and the one behind him says 'Too soon'. A new painting features the text 'Fuck continuity'. Being caught in between two fires, or like Buridan's donkey, between two haystacks: it is an existential experience with which his work engages. Vanderleenen's paintings are populated with figures that are overwhelmed by nature (the bathers), by doubt or fear ('Man mad with fear'), or by their own clumsiness and vulnerability (falling and tripping men). At times, he uses a direct reference to Ensor or Symbolism (a skull with a hammer), but there is always a mysterious atmosphere that hangs over this world of shadows - full of pitch-black humour. "I depict the world as a large retirement home in which all of us are trapped." It is like the story from the film 'Doctor Caligari' - although the sets in Marc Vanderleenen's film would undoubtedly look very different from those of the expressionist film from 1920.

Marc Holtoff- 2017