

Lecture at the opening exhibition Petra de Jong in the LOFT The Hague
by Matthijs de Boer, Urban Planner and Architect.

I grew up with Petra's work and I've always been inspired by it. It went something like this: Already in my student room above my bed hung this painting that is so powerful that, when it was already light outside and I slept through the day, I also saw it in my dreams, but in a peculiar perspective. So something like this: Where I walked in my dream, the painting repeated itself over and over again in the pavement.

So much for the anecdote. Now let's get serious.

In the last century, many painters have gone through a development from figurative to abstract. Of course, we have our own Piet Mondriaan. But also someone like Mark Rothko. And someone I suspect inspired Petra: Bridget Riley. This development from figurative to abstract was often about striving for a message that was as clear as possible. Without references to anything else.

That in contrast to the painters who wanted to show us something that was not actually there, that we are not looking at a painting but at a completely different kind of reality, they wanted to deceive our eyes, as it were, or 'trompe l'oeil'. (Pere Borrell del Caso, 1874)

The abstracts didn't want that. The canvas is the canvas, painted with paint. Or as everyone says these days: It is what it is. But not with the accompanying resignation, but very penetrating. Abstraction does not mean that there is no emotion involved. But the painting is what it is. For the record: it is not a pipe. (René Magritte)

This certainly also applies to Petra's paintings. They are what they are and nothing more, and above all, nothing less!

But Petra, unlike Mondriaan, Riley and Rothko, has gone through the opposite development. From abstract to figurative. I'm showing, with seven-league boots, something of that development. Her paintings do not depict a scene, but they do show a composition. Compositions in the flat surface of the canvas. But with the strong suggestion of transparency. And movement. Depth, but not with the old tricks of perspective, but rather with 'layering'. Literal layering because of the application of the paint to the canvas in thin transparent layers. And above all; Meaningful layering.

Or engagement, because Petra has something to say to us. At the same time, it leaves a lot to our own interpretation and imagination. For example, I was convinced that this painting from half a century ago was called "encounter". But it's just called "From Dark to Light". The mobility that is in it can be found in this recent work. And so it is not for nothing that the Meuse and the Bosphorus are intertwined in this beautiful painting.

You should know that, it doesn't have a title on it. (By the way, the sources of inspiration can be found in Petra's house, right down to the smallest room.)

And it's not for nothing that we see the blades of wind turbines between the waves. Petra thinks something of that. The transparency and layering of the older work are still there, but now with a new meaning. A serious message may be hidden in it, but it is so depicted that it does not make you gloomy, but rather takes courage because there is so much beauty in the world.

I don't have any pictures of Petra's recent work. Because the real paintings hang on the walls here, so I would say: walk around, see and enjoy them.