

**The Word Magazine** : 'An interview with Belgian painting prodigy Rinus Van de Velde', by Sarah Schug, August 6th, 2012

## An interview with Belgian painting prodigy Rinus Van de Velde

Having just had a look at his most recent work in last week's portfolio presentation, we sit down with Rinus Van de Velde to talk about his working process, living in a fake reality and why the world doesn't really need art.



## **What are you working on at the moment?**

Right now I'm preparing an exhibition for the Patrick Painter Gallery in LA. I'm making a new series for it consisting of 13 new drawings. I'm collaborating with a good friend who writes the texts which accompany my pieces. My works have always been based on photographs, but what's different now is that I stage and take the photographs myself. The people you see in my drawings are always me or my friend Koen Sels. I'm also working on three new large-scale pieces for the abc art fair in Berlin.

## **How long did it take you to finish the series?**

For the LA show it took me three months to finish everything. I have to say I used to do more, but as now I stage the photos myself and mainly make large-scale works, everything takes a bit longer. Also, I changed from using paper to canvas because it's more stable, easier to frame and has more of an object feel to it. But it takes more time than drawing on paper. I do draw daily though.

## **How has your work developed throughout the years?**

Initially I studied sculpture, but I found that too intense, too slow. It takes several months to finish a single piece. I prefer to get results faster. So I started making drawings, first in colour, later in black and white until I changed to charcoal. My drawings became bigger in size and I started adding text. And since March this year I'm staging the photos I use as a starting point for the drawings myself. That was a very big step for me. I like how I can arrange everything myself, play with light and shadow and so on.

'The thing is, you can easily imagine a world without art, but not without hospitals. Art is not essential.'

## **What influences and inspires you?**

Before I started staging my own photos, I based my works on images I saw in magazines, on the internet or in movies. I still look at

photographs a lot, but now they are merely inspirations. I read a lot of books, biographies of obscure people mainly, and watch a lot of documentaries. Recently I got fascinated with the story of chess legend Bobby Fischer. I prefer marginal figures. It doesn't work with famous people as Einstein or Picasso, they're too known. When I look at pictures I start inhabiting them – I think up a story, fantasize about what it would be like to be inside of them.

### **How do you get from an idea to the final product?**

That's a very big process. Let me take the example of Bobby Fischer. I saw this documentary, 'Bobby Fischer Against the World' and was fascinated by his persona. Then I started reading books, looking for images, collecting everything I could find related to the subject. In a next step I organised everything in my head, built sceneries and got some extra people for the staging of the photographs. When I've worked on the images with photoshop, I finally start drawing. So in the end drawing is just a small part of my work.

### **Why is there always a text below your pictures? Not many artists do that.**

Otherwise they are just pictures without any context, and everything is just about the quality of the picture. I don't believe in that. I want to create my own meaning. Of course I cannot really control what people think when they see my works, but I don't want it to be too random. I create a narrative, my own fictional universe.



### **What is the message behind your work?**

There's not really a message... As an artist there is always the danger to sound like a teacher, to lecture your audience. I don't want that. I just feel the necessity to create and to share my work, not to spread a certain message. Whilst every image transmits its own message you can also see my now 600 drawings as one big story. It's like a photo album, you can look at them separately or together.

### **So if your drawings are a story – what is the story about?**

It's about me and my fake biography, about the life I did not live. If it was about my real life it would be pretty boring, I'm just sitting alone in my studio here most of the time.

### **What do you hope people take away from your art?**

I don't like to think about things like that. It can be very disappointing. Another artist once said something like the following: You only make art for five people; your mom, your dad, your

girlfriend, your dog and your aunt. When I create, I only do so for a few people, I cannot think of a big audience. It's a very individual process, I'm alone with myself most of the time. I have to blank them out. Otherwise I should have become a politician.

'In the end it's all about finding a way to live in this world, to create your own structure. Everybody has to create his or her own fiction and live in it, otherwise you can't survive.'

### **What subjects do you deal with in your art?**

With the mystical aspects of friendship for example. Or with the romantic idea of genius in the case of Bobby Fischer. When I look back on my work I always dealt with romantic ideas in a way. But my art is also about lying, imagining, fantasies. In the end it's all about finding a way to live in this world, to create your own structure. Everybody has to create his or her own fiction and live in it, otherwise you can't survive.

### **Can you explain that a bit more? What kind of fiction are you creating for yourself?**

Every day I have to lie to myself about having to go to the studio. Because in our society there is no real necessity for art. I'm not part of anything I don't help anyone or cooperate with someone. I have to lie to myself about the fact that art is important.

### **I'm sure a lot of people would disagree with that. I think it would be quite a sad world without any art in it...**

The thing is, you can easily imagine a world without art, but not without hospitals. Art is not essential.

### **How would you describe the art scene in Belgium today?**

It's very small as Belgium is a small country. But it's very lively and has a big tradition of very good artists and keeps producing them.

James Ensor is one of the greatest artists in history. Now there's Luc Tuymans. There must be something special about Belgium and art, but I don't know what it is. Maybe it's our tradition, maybe also because we are not over-supported as in the Netherlands for example – but don't interpret that as a demand for less support!!



**What would you have been if you hadn't been an artist?**

I'd have liked to be a professional athlete. Maybe the Olympics are brainwashing me a bit. I've played a lot of table tennis and dreamt about being on top of the world. I guess now I'm too old! But recently I started taking tennis classes and I still dream about winning the US Open or Roland Garros.

**What other Belgian artists do you like?**

Luc Tuymans, Guillaume Bijl and James Ensor.

**How important is your environment in shaping your work?**

It is very important. I need people around me. There are about five of



them who are constantly here and come visit me every week in my studio. They are the only ones who are totally honest with me, something that's never the case at an exhibition opening for example. There are may three or four people in my life who've seen all my work, every single piece. Friends, other artists, gallerists. It is important to have support from people outside of the art scene, who also support you in your normal, daily life. As an artist you are always alone in your studio, obsessed with yourself and your thoughts, and that can become too much sometimes. I'm a very bad cook and so my friends come over and cook for me. It's important to have friends around you, people who take care of you.

### **What is the legacy you wish to leave behind as an artist?**

Many might lie about it, but every artist thinks about this question. In the end you make things in order to leave something behind. Artists usually have a very big ego and they don't have children but instead want to leave something else behind.