

GALERIE ONRUST AMSTERDAM



Robert Zandvliet, *Untitled*, 2018, mixed media on paper, 23 x 31 cm

Ričardas Vaitiekūnas – Robert Zandvliet

Paint on Paper

March 2–30, 2019

Painting without a preconceived plan. Robert Zandvliet does it nearly every day. Not on canvas but on paper, on small sheets roughly the size of an A4. Lying on the table in his studio is always a series that he works on at certain times. He paints and scrapes, sweeps his brush empty with a fluid movement, or covers everything with a transparent layer and starts over again. Sometimes he works smoothly, and other times ruggedly or directly from the tube. These are abstract movements in paint, and yet in each work a landscape with emerging light, vistas and stage-like coulisses can be found. This is how Zandvliet has been making paintings on paper, alternating between mindlessness and curiosity, between chance and control, for fifteen years now.

Definitely not preliminary studies, they can sooner be considered improvisations like those of a professional snowboarder 'freestyling' with lightning-fast tracks in the snow, the result of know-how and years of experience. Free experiments, but distinctly those of Zandvliet.

When Zandvliet was asked to make a selection from a series of works on paper by the Lithuanian artist Ričardas Vaitiekūnas, he immediately recognized a similarly free movement. Zandvliet had become familiar with the work of Vaitiekūnas mainly through his paintings that were exhibited – and acquired – by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1996. Densely painted works, oil on canvas, that nevertheless frequently have cartoon-like clarity. As Vaitiekūnas received his training during the Communist regime, he had acknowledged realism as a factor in his work for many years, yet always avoided the typically social-realist subject matter.

His landscapes and still lifes were perhaps, in fact, a silent protest: images to which little meaning could be ascribed, as this allowed him to 'do his own thing' in a painterly sense. Paintings in which the depiction competes with and is subordinate to the paint, to the color, to the meticulous construction and stratification of the image into a balanced whole. When Lithuania became independent from Russia in 1990, that freedom proved to be essential for the development of Vaitiekūnas's oeuvre; he then began to interpret figuration in an increasingly broad sense. It is no coincidence that Vaitiekūnas is considered the most prominent painter in Lithuania.

But Vaitiekūnas's paintings on paper came as a surprise to Zandvliet. They have a similarly powerful appearance but are – unlike Zandvliet's own paintings – actually open and light. The compact images in oil paint have given way to a loose handwriting in tempera or watercolor, where the actions and the brushstrokes almost constitute calligraphic marks. As if the casualness of paper stimulates freedom and speed. And while landscape is always vaguely present in the work Zandvliet, Vaitiekūnas also hovers somewhere between figuration and abstraction. He defies our perception. Reminiscent of the optical illusion in which a rabbit can also be a duck – but never at the same time – a line in the work of Vaitiekūnas can be the essence of a figure. For, as evident in a series of ink drawings, Vaitiekūnas is a master of reducing things to their essence. In *Paint on Paper* the works of Vaitiekūnas and Zandvliet hang side by side. Those of Zandvliet show the movement becoming dense and intensified. Small works mounted on aluminum become detached from the wall and almost have the look of sculpture, while the drawings of Vaitiekūnas actually seem to break open. The works of the two painters complement each other in terms of color, movement and focus; their contrasts bring out the best in each other. Two artists, and two generations, working from different points of departure, but in these free and loose works the two come close to each other.

translation: Beth O'Brien



Ričardas Vaitiekūnas, Untitled, 1991, gouache on paper, 49 x 63 cm