

THIJS JANSEN – ALLE 13 GOED

“Alle 13 goed” was the title of a legendary series of compilation albums produced in the 1970s and 80s. Currently, in 2012, it is the theme of the first museum solo exhibition of the young artist Thijs Jansen from Groningen (born 1986). The numbers are displayed at an equal distance from each other like singles on an LP, and they are both a 'best of' compilation and appear in random order.

Using his own memory as a guide, Jansen had used wooden panels as the base for everyday scenes which capture an atmosphere somewhere between irony and impending doom – it's narrative, playful and sure to surprise!

Each of Jansen's works tells a personal story from his own memories, with all its shortcomings. An everyday moment that has stayed with him, combined with images from today's omnipresent consumer culture.

The memory turns out to be very selective. In the work, Oom Theo ['Uncle Theo'] (2011, 15 x 20 cm), the title has nothing to do with relatives, but refers to the shop selling comic strips where he worked part-time, and the corner in the back where the 'dirty books' were kept, known as 'Uncle Theo's horny sex corner'. The image is a combination of a photo retrieved from internet and a background of old-fashioned wallpaper of his own design. This and similar assemblage art compositions with small, personal aspects of everyday life provide the motifs for Jansen's work.

ABOUT HIS WORK

The perhaps surprisingly small size of Jansen's panels does not mean the works can be viewed with a cursory glance. On the contrary. The viewer wishing to take in all the details – how the light falls, the perspective, the spatial composition, the motifs or the varied painting techniques – of his precisely created compositions, will have to stop and take their time. “This format is a means of forcing a deeper level of concentration,” says the artist.

The everyday nature of the situations depicted reflects the chosen materials: a wooden plank, unframed, slightly uneven. Jansen's former ambition to be a comic-strip artist is often evident; not only in the narrative rendition, but also in the often comic-style images of, for example, the portrait gallery in International Rescue (2010, 25 x 30 cm) or in his striking love of details, as shown in his piquant work De pornohoek ['The porn corner'] (2010, 25 x 30 cm).

Jansen begins with a thick base layer applied with a large brush whereby the paint spills over the edges of the panel, and goes on to build up a complex spatial setting using oil and acrylic paints. Back in 2009 the brushstrokes are still somewhat transparent and sketchy. Sometimes he uses pencil (Kleedhokjes ['Changing cubicles'], 2009). An ochre background is dimly visible through the uppermost layer of paint, emphasizing the stage-like feeling of the panels. The artist uses tape to help create straight lines and larger planes. In this way he builds up layers of paint that are minuscule yet solid. In his latest works this results in an almost three-dimensional surface whereby in addition to paint and tape, he uses a scratch knife. Jansen: “In this way you can use opposite means to achieve the same result.”

Spatiality is a key concept, both in the work itself and in the distinctive design of this exhibition. In art history since the time of the Renaissance, the painter's easel has been seen as a window and as a metaphor for aspect and perspective. Contemporary analogies of this can be found throughout Jansen's work: the mirror, the open window and the television can be seen as symbols for the preoccupation with perspective.

Following in this line is his choice to portray a cropped view of the subject, a fragment of a situation, as a recurring motif in his work. As if you are looking through the lens of a movie camera from a viewpoint that has been surreptitiously off-centered. The compositions appear to contain the movement and tension of a film that is stuck in a moment between treacherous danger and a happy end. Many associations are included, yet at the same time little is divulged.

ABOUT THE TITLE 'Alle 13 Goed'

In 1971 if you heard someone shout "Alle 13 Goed!" [All 13 good/right!], everyone pricked up their ears. It meant they had won the jackpot in the football pools and would be taking home a fortune. So in 1971 the Philips Phonografische Industrie (Phonogram) launched a new series of compilation albums, featuring around thirteen numbers by mainly Dutch artists, under the name Alle 13 Goed! The series was a runaway success and the title became a popular catchphrase in its day. The final album in the series was released in 1996, a CD entitled Alle 13 Goed + 7 Nog Beter [All 13 good + 7 even better].

Playing with this idea, Thijs Jansen created a 'best of' selection of his work from his graduation from the Frank Mohr Institute in Groningen in 2010 to the present day.

Jansen: "I create my paintings in a seemingly random order. At first sight there is no clear connection in either the theme or the subject. To use a term from pop music, you could say they are all singles." Seen in this context the title Alle 13 goed is well chosen and also reveals a little of the humor that is a typical feature of Jansen's work (don't forget to count the paintings!).

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

For this exhibition Jansen translated his fascination with spatiality into an exhibition model specially developed for SCHUNCK*. Taking inspiration from the -1 lay-out, he suggested that the works should not only be hung in a purely random order, but that they should all be hung at precisely the same distance from each other. Every four meters, beginning on the left-hand wall as you enter the exhibition, the panels are hung according to a strict cadence that stimulates objectivity. This tight rhythm is broken by a humorous note as it means that a work may be hidden away almost disrespectfully in the corner.

In this way it is impossible to view two works simultaneously; each painting becomes an experience in itself. Jansen: "In order to allow the visitor to view each painting optimally, the presentation needs to facilitate both the littleness and the magnitude of the work."

This forces the viewer into action, to constantly switch between a close-up and a panorama view of the room as a whole. He moves through the exhibition like the eye on the panel, switching focus between details and overview. Following lines, colors and planes, thoughts are formed regarding the keenly observed and humorous stories of which the true profundity remains concealed in an existential note.

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