

FRANS SCHUURSMA

Beyond Appearances

For over thirty years Frans Schuursma has focused his gaze on what's affectionately called the city of light, capturing its intimate moods, unique character and pervading frivolity with an astonishingly fresh interpretation. But this apparently charming approach conceals a tragic poetry and sardonic analysis of our sycophantic societies which are losing their bearings, too often the victims of the dictates of some, to the detriment of their spontaneous riches.

Like Grosz in his time, the artist cares nothing about passing fashions and shows, introducing a very personal reading into his message. His Platonic view explores modern times, these virtual illusory worlds in which the light comes from behind to illuminate those who, like puppets controlled by distant, often ill-intentioned hands, remind us of the Allegory of the Cave. A visionary but also preserving the heritage of the First Civilisations that have always nourished him, this leader of the Nouveau Baroque regularly invites the shadow of figures from all horizons to his imaginary table, from the flamboyant Marquis de Sade to the eternal Woman or a native American chief, an aboriginal shaman, an African sage, a Chinese calligrapher or a druid, not forgetting Dada and his surrealist cousins and our friends the Animals who have an equal place in his paintings to humans, and rightly so, establishing a link between these illustrious predecessors and the boldest contemporary avant-garde creators.

Schuursma's mythical works like those of his pivotal periods, which are now greatly sought-after, are all incontrovertible milestones on this rich itinerary. Intolerable contradiction of reason or dionysiac intoxication? The surrealist projection we see creates a freedom of thought without however reducing it to a simple sociological transfiguration. A playful voyeur of the urban jungle he dramatises, the artist is an expert in portraying unsatisfied human desires and the frustrations caused by taboos. Riding the wave of our impulsive antagonisms, he invites us to join in irreverently delicious and irresistible games, in which the conscious and the subconscious interact, like sleepwalkers dancing.

Like the great, sadly bygone, civilisations who used masks to assign roles, Schuursma puts bizarre improbably shaped grinning animals in his paintings. These wildcat protagonists cross the urban backdrops turning them into a theatre stage in a psychoanalytical approach echoing de Chirico and shaking up the bonds with reality. This singular way of mapping human and urban morphologies challenges us, as does his anthropological observation of the "big city" populated by creatures with a tribal connotation, seated on chairs without legs, a reminder of life's instability, surrounded by leaning, destructured buildings in the form of liners which he generally moors on the Place de l'Alma. Ship-like buildings bound for or arriving from nowhere... or maybe on some metaphysical journey.

Identifiable by a singular writing with mirrored syntactic characteristics, the artist also introduces strange figures "masked" behind heavily medalled uniforms or depicted as tattooed "savages", which become, by turns, voyeurs, spectators or actors in an enigmatic, often impertinent, role play. Here, the enigma aims to provoke a different way of seeing our societies behind the subliminal detail, artifices and delusions, all narrative tools. Between reality and fiction, imbued with Dadaist convergences of a good-natured ferocity, the artist is nevertheless terribly alone. Exploring his own solitude – and ours – which he fears like Hopper, he builds sequences in which he highlights our utopia within imaginary spaces in a slowed-down rhythm, as if to better underline the importance of the moment and its elasticity. In this

way, he deliberately blurs our reading of the organisation of a chaos which he restores to order to make us uncertain. His series "Regards sur le vide", "Entre deux mers", "Les trois grâces", "Colère métallique", "Le masque africain", "Upside down" and "La célèbre exposition sur le néant"... are a collision of reflections on humankind's place in the Universe. Sometimes, Schuursma depicts himself in timeless autobiographies intermingled with obsessions, anecdotes and intimate mythologies related to his cultural birthplace and his childhood memories of the Netherlands: the war and its ravages, a father fighting for the resistance and frequently absent, lack of food, a brave mother, a large family and the eternal beet soup at a time when his family had nothing.

The artist invites us into his paradigms where the disintegrated void consists of complementary materials needing to be assembled to give us a clearer glimpse of our own... A world of illusions and exclusions in which social dislocations engender the dehumanisation of our societies as they lose their identity. DADA understood this right from the start. Looking at the universe is like looking at time: a "dilated or accelerated" time which differs according to the relative inertia and gravity as we learnt from Karl Schwarzschild. Schuursma's intuitionistic work, closely linked with cognitive psychology and the enigma of the Universe, opens up all possibilities, such as the mental processes of handling information and behavioural reaction time which variably affects our perception according to the visual obstacles, corpuscular waves and interference encountered; the artist, the philosopher and the scientist often work in symbiosis... As shown in the metaphor of the cylinder, this is particularly "visible" in the surprising series of coffee pots which become the pretext for a dialogue resonating with intimacy and for original choreographies made of little abstract touches. In these works transparency opens up inner paths of knowledge where it feels good to lose yourself to restore that vital breath. Some of them suggest icons, according to Michel Bernheim; communion with the celestial world and meeting of forms and dynamics approaching the Supreme Multiple Reality.

*"The important thing is not finishing a work but seeing that it may one day be the start of something" * Miro.*

Invited to participate in many shows, including FIAC, Schuursma was chosen by the Qingdao Museum in 2015 for the biggest exhibition of European contemporary artists in China marking the fortieth anniversary of diplomatic relations between these nations. In 2016, he will be exhibiting works on the theme: © "Le visage et son masque" [the face and its mask] imagined by WTH.

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Text extracted from the book in the process of being written:

Schuursma « Au delà des apparences »...