



Press release

PLAYSTATION @ Galerie Fons Welters

Galerie Fons Welters

10 October – 7 November 2009

Opening: Saturday 10 October, 17:00 – 19:00

Opening hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 13:00 – 18:00

Pascal Bastiaenen

In the painting *Rebuilding the East* (2009), a group of Arabs in long robes cross a river towards the bank where some Western soldiers in camouflage dress are waiting for them. Standing in the foreground is a man wearing a large pair of swimming trunks. Is he a tourist? With a somewhat awkward expression, but a prominent presence nonetheless, he meets the viewer's eye. Or is he perhaps looking at his holiday partner, who is taking a picture of the goings-on? While the men in the background almost blend into the surroundings, this man with his sky-blue swimming trunks claims our attention.

In this work, **Pascal Bastiaenen** (Den Bosch, 1981) criticises the reconstruction mission in Afghanistan and Iraq by suggesting that in reality, it is other interests that have priority. The work is characteristic of his paintings, which often feature people who are ignoring what is going on around them. **Bastiaenen** is manifestly disgusted by today's world, in which our constant desire to possess more and more blinds us to the darker sides of our society. Harrowing images are so ubiquitous in the news that they are no longer seen, and we may indeed choose quite deliberately to ignore everything they represent.

Bastiaenen's unequivocal political stand, as reflected in his choice of politics, is reinforced by a controlled style of painting – savage and powerful. At times, the photographic-realistic images become near-abstractions through the use of separate brushstrokes in oil placed alongside one another. Then again, the use of bright colours, contrasting with the subdued pastel hues, links up with contrasts in content such as that between paradise and perdition. While the artist's earlier work, showing vociferous crowds of protesters, for instance, originated from manipulated news photographs, the narrative element of his recent work is more elusive. Its meaning is not immediately revealed; we are forced to look closer. On closer inspection of the tree with little coloured lights in *Tree decoration* (2009), for instance, the peak appears to be decorated by two dangling legs. An image that initially seems fairly prosaic soon reveals its distressing implications.

Bastiaenen makes a statement, conveyed each time afresh in new images. He also presents a clear vision of the art of painting: far from being an anachronistic medium, painting is both an important form of artistic expression and, now as always, a highly effective way of criticising the events taking place in today's world.

[Rosa Juno Streekstra]