

Rijks 1: Philipp Kremer

The ideal might not be so ideal

Written by Vincent van Velsen

Ideals just do not make sense. In his large canvasses Philipp Kremer questions reality and perfection through figuration and harmony. This is the first in a series of short preview portraits.

The conflict of the cliché and the exaggerated value that is ascribed to perfection is the subject matter the German artist has committed himself to. His thin layers of paint are defined by their simple but precise brush strokes that depict fabric and form in a seemingly easy manner. This way of working does not come as a surprise when Philipp Kremers early works are taken into account: almost a decade ago he painted merely abstract. Today's composition and positioning of figures can be traced back to these early works. Back then, Kremer imposed small deficiencies, making sense at first glance, but always daring the viewer at second sight. The paintings seemed not right, depth was not consistent, symmetry was not totally symmetrical and internal references created visual friction.

And friction is exactly what Philipp Kremer wants to create today, not per se visual, but on a conceptual level. Being aware of the long and elaborate heritage of his medium, he continuously searches for new imagery that is worth being added permanently to the canvas and the line of history. After his transition to figuration Philipp Kremer remained to focus on pinching the public by providing conflicting clichés that on the one hand seem perfect pictures that we all are familiar with and strive for, though at the same time the eeriness of the ideal creates a tension: it is just too positive.

When relating to, and recognizing the familiar imagery one could easily accept a shallow narrative of happiness. The distortion comes to play when one looks longer and starts to reflect. Then the daily strive of mankind to be happy becomes an illusion. Philipp Kremer paints these illusions and questions them, showing us that they actually do not make sense: harmony is just not as harmonious as we are made to believe. This questioning of certain corny ideals can also be found in his extensive series on girls with horses, as well as in the title of his last exhibition at Apice for Artists: Love, one of the most exploited subjects possible. In both cases Kremer hints towards kitsch imagery and popular media while questioning the wrenching of ideals and happiness.

Especially in the context of the Rijksakademie it is interesting to see that the artist chooses to depict communities and their aim for perfection and structure. To make the reference more clear: even the chairs from the entrée of the institution can be traced back.

The bold colouring and expressive but abstract faces with political correct colours on large canvasses refer to a somewhat baroque idea of measurement and the occupation of space. The choice of colour is partially random. Kremer uses cards to choose certain colours; an almost surreal process that, amongst others, refers to the randomness of reality and thereby contrasting the perfect picture with the actual triviality of life. All the bright dancers and chanting faces might not be all that perfect. The spectator is asked to think about this, which might leave a somewhat awkward feeling, and for some maybe shattered dreams, but the ideal might just not be so ideal.

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