

HOPSTREET

Le siège de la mémoire, 29 October – 17 December 2011

Renato Nicolodi, Sara Rajaei, Marcel van Eeden, Sofie Van der Linden
curated by Patrick Ronse

Le siège de la mémoire deals with memory and the way memory and recollection are covered in the oeuvres of Renato Nicolodi, Marcel van Eeden, Sofie Van der Linden and Sara Rajaei.

Renato Nicolodi's story finds its breeding ground in memories of his deceased Italian grandfather and his stay in prison. The artist recorded these stories on tape. The artist is not interested in a literal transcription or a translation. His work can be regarded as a reflection on power, megalomania and the masses.

Memory is the ability to remember information. This covers three aspects: saving, storing and accessing. Marcel van Eeden accesses information that was never saved or stored. He is interested in 'minus me', memory that treats the period before his birth in 1965. He uses texts and images. He does not shun fieldwork, but facts and fiction consciously cross each other.

Personal experiences are at the basis of works by Sofie Van der Linden and Sara Rajaei. Memories are formed by emotions that are linked to original experiences. Sara Rajaei strongly emphasises the narrative aspect. Childhood memories are embedded in text and image in a gripping video. Sofie Van der Linden explores 'spaces', interior and exterior spaces, lost spaces. She reconstructs the spaces in the school where she spent her youth, as well as on walks through town using subtle drawings so the experience of drawing goes together with the memory of time and space. The mental space that arises while drawing interests her most.

The book *Hommage* (2004), an edition in seven copies and one AP, is an outsider in the oeuvre of the artist **Renato Nicolodi** (Brussels, 1980). The 42-page book uses photos to depict a journey in time, namely the Nicolodi family's annual visit to the shooting stand at the fun fair. The first protagonist is the artist's Italian grandfather who was captured by the Germans and held in bunkers during World War II. The artist is in the more recent photos. A fun fair photo seems banal and innocent, but the observer is placed within range year after year.

The artist's story finds its breeding ground in memories from the life of this Italian grandfather and his involuntary stay in bunkers. Renato Nicolodi, who studied painting, was initially fascinated by the pictorial qualities that prints from these dilapidated shelters offered him. He calls them 'vehicles for memories of an emotionally charged past'. Later he also became fascinated by the bunker as a spatial object.

He has been making architectural (scale) models with an undeniably minimalist slant since 2003. On the one hand, they can have a repulsive effect on the observer due to the presumed underlying perfidious ideologies, such as the architecture that was propagated by the Third Reich. On the other hand, they tempt the viewer via their stylised design and classic austerity. They look archetypal, utopian and visionary.

There is no trace of human presence in his architectural models, but he lets viewers suspect that there was at some time. In his work, the artist reflects on power, megalomania, the masses and how they encroach upon each other. This is illustrated excellently in the work *Panopticon II* from 2009.

Panopticon, an important work in the artist's oeuvre, takes us back to the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham and his work *Panopticon or the Inspection House* from 1791. In Bentham's version, Panopticon stands in front of a ring-shaped architectural construction that enables him to control, observe, discipline and improve a large group of people. The tower, in the centre of the building, offers views of the cells on the inside of the ring. In this tower, an overseer can accurately observe the cellmates without being seen himself. After a while, his gaze is internalised by the prisoners.

Marcel van Eeden (The Hague, 1965) for more than 15 years has been working on a continuously expanding oeuvre of drawings and paintings that are based on photos taken before his birth. A large part of his work consists of comic strips in which Van Eeden mixes historic facts with fiction. The same characters frequently return in varying circumstances. The comic strips can be 'read' on their own or as part of his total oeuvre.

Because Marcel van Eeden does thorough fieldwork before starting a new series of drawings, it is not clear for viewers where the facts end and where fiction begins.

Van Eeden's work is inspired by philosophers like Arthur Schopenhauer and Emil Cioran. The poet Gerrit Achterberg also influenced him, more specifically the poem 'Anti-materie', in which Achterberg introduces his 'minus I' concept. For Van Eeden, 'minus me' was the realisation that you are defined by what you are not, your opposite, your non-being, your death: 'The time that you will be dead lies ahead of you. It is still indefinite, but there was also a time when you were dead; the time before your birth. You can describe that time of your death, that part of your 'minus me', your anti-me.' An interest in the 'minus me', in Van Eeden's case the period before 1965, defines his work. Initially he copied old newspaper reports and photos. That led to a weblog and a new drawing every day. The artist describes it as an 'Encyclopaedia of my death'. Van Eeden draws in sober, sombre black-white; usually figurative, but sometimes abstract shapes and patterns too, in a style that is somewhere between the tone of film noir and expressionistic townscapes in charcoal that were popular in the Netherlands in the 1930s.

Sara Rajaei (Abadan, Iran, 1976) lives and works in The Hague. Her films are based on stories from her own life or things that she (coincidentally) hears. These stories and personal histories form the basis for layered videos that leave a lasting impression.

In *A leap year that started on a Friday* (2010) Sara Rajaei poignantly tells her memory of an attack that she witnessed (indirectly, via TV footage) when she was 12 years old. The work impresses due to the poignant story and due to its simplicity.

The memory is abstracted to text and several images that try to grasp the oppressive nightmares after the attack. It is a story about loss, deprivation and sorrow.

The central character in the film is a Pakistani man named Scheherazade, also the name of the storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights*, the woman who saved her life by telling stories.

The work is a penetrating mix of a practically empty screen with a projected text, the soft voice of the reader and, at the end, a few images that embed themselves in our brains and leave the observer confused.

Emphasis is strongly placed on the narrative aspect, but for attentive viewers *A leap year that started on a Friday* has an engaging, hidden meaning.

A leap year that started on a Friday (2010) was produced during the artist's residence in Künstlerhaus Schloss Balmoral in Bad Ems, Germany.

Sofie Van der Linden (Antwerp, 1986) departs from an interest in spaces, more specifically the experience and memory of certain spaces. 'Spaces' should be regarded in the broadest sense of the term: interior and exterior spaces, cityscapes, as well as forgotten and lost spaces. The artist maps out these spaces using subtle and detailed drawings that are sometimes complemented with short texts or interventions in the space. Sofie Van der Linden works with places that she has carried with her for quite some time or places that fascinate her in one way or another. By empathising with the places that she draws, she enters a mental space - a 'state of mind' that she finds significant.

Sofie Van der Linden's work investigates memory, an amalgam of personal experiences that are reflected strikingly and 'correctly' in *Zandstraat* and *Grootsermentstraat*, two large-format drawings from 2011. Each drawing, no matter how concentrated and meticulously they are executed, is associated with a loss of control, with 'unwanted' errors in perspective and proportions.

Whereas time and space are solidified in an immobile mass of concrete for Renato Nicolodi, Sofie Van der Linden is able to render time and space in fragile drawings.

Sofie Van der Linden completed two new, large-format drawings for this exhibition at Hopstreet.