

**Roger Raveel - The left arm**

17 March – 5 May, 2018

A seemingly charming drawing of a small toy bear will adorn the window of Hopstreet Gallery in 2018. Roger Raveel drew it in 1952, one year after creating a small painting of the same subject. Like other works from the early 1950s, the drawing shows the exceptional courage of a young, rural artist to resolutely make quick work of the suffocating legacy of Flemish post-expressionism. Rudi Fuchs correctly pointed out in the *Groene Amsterdammer* that Raveel depicted the loose left arm of the small bear in a moving manner by applying small hatched lines instead of a dark daub of paint or ink. Everything about the drawing is crystal clear and stripped of all visual frills. According to Fuchs, that's an artistic legacy from abstract art, which was started by Cézanne and reached its full potential by Mondriaan and Malevitch. Raveel has never done anything other than make visual art that is based on a razor-sharp analysis of reality. At the same time he is able to give the new achievements of his distinguished predecessors from abstract art a place in post-war figurative painting.

*Beertje* (1952) is one of Raveel's early works but it is also a contemporary work of art for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Roger Raveel is considered one of the most important Belgian artists after WWII. His work cannot be classified in familiar art-historical partitions. It's modern and timeless. It shuns every one-sided approach. The breeding ground of Raveel's art is his immediate surroundings, but this doesn't mean that he is tied to one location. In his paintings, drawings, objects and installations, the objects around him are given universal meaning: a man, a woman, plants, a bicycle trailer, advertising and technology are seen in time and space.

His diverse expressive language is extremely fascinating. Incompatible writings or painting methods often give his work a tension that makes the observer rediscover reality.

**Roger Raveel** was born on 15 July 1921 in Machelen-aan-de-Leie, a village near Ghent where he lived and worked until his death on 30 January 2013. He studied at the Municipal Academy of Deinze and at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent. His instructors were Hubert Malfait and Jos Verdegheem, amongst others. In the early 1950s he became acquainted with painters from the Cobra group, like Karel Appel and Corneille, via his friend Hugo Claus. He wanted to take very different paths with his painting. In 1962 he spent three months in Albisola Mare (Italy) where he worked and exhibited with artists like Lucio Fontana and Asger Jorn. In the second half of the 1950s his work evolved into a kind of abstract painting that has its roots in experiencing the organic, the vegetative, the animal. Around 1962 he painted a triptych entitled 'Neerhof' with a cage in the middle with a live pigeon. He wanted to establish a direct dialogue between art and reality.

In 1966-67 he transformed the cellar corridors of Beervelde castle (near Ghent) into a pictorial environment. He received assistance from Etienne Elias, Raoul De Keyser and Reinier Lucassen. After the paintings in Beervelde he worked on several painted objects such as the 'Illusion group' and 'Small garden with small cart to conquer the sky'. His alert environmental awareness led the artist to visualise his commitment via happenings like 'The Swans of Bruges' and 'Raveel on the Lys River' (1971). Almost 20 years later, in 1990, Roger Raveel commemorated the outbreak of WWII by pushing a painted wardrobe mounted on wheels through the city centre of Brussels. For his artistic activity and graphic contribution to art history, he received honourable mention for the Young Belgian Painting Prize (1958 and 1960) and honours in the Europe Prize (1962), the International Joost van den Vondel Prize (1983), the Golden Medal of the Flemish Council (1992), he was knighted (1995) and received the Van Acker Prize (1996).

**Piet Coessens** is curator of the Roger Raveel Museum in Machelen-aan-de-Leie. He was Director of the Association for Exhibitions from 1992 to 2002, where he organised retrospectives of Andy Warhol, Marcel Broodthaers, Robert Smithson, William Kentridge, Lygia Clark, etc. He also worked as artistic advisor for the Flemish Master Architect from 2004 to 2007 and supervised numerous art projects in the public sphere.

The art of Roger Raveel, who was his teacher when he was 10 years old, remains a source of inspiration for Piet Coessens.