

Walter Swennen

HIC HAEC HOC

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Press Release

Xavier Hufkens is pleased to announce the opening of an exhibition of new paintings by Walter Swennen.

A painting by Walter Swennen always comes as a surprise. It might contain an intriguing combination of words or an isolated letter of the alphabet, a fractured message or a semi-recognisable phrase. Perhaps it will be figurative, abstract, or something in-between. Then there are the textures: opaque or transparent, rough or smooth, glossy or matte. Not to mention the techniques: brush, palette knife, sgraffito and impasto, and endless fluctuations and combinations thereof, not to mention a wealth of less orthodox methods. Finally, and last but not least, there are the colours: vivid, evocative and always beautiful. Look carefully at a work by Walter Swennen and you will discern – either instantaneously or over time – some or all of these qualities. These material aspects of the work reveal the many and varied layers of its construction. In short, they disclose ‘how’ the painting was made.

But the questions that immediately arise are related to the ‘what’ and the ‘why’. What is this painting about? Why is it so? Walter Swennen’s paintings are not necessarily ‘about’ anything: they are a form of visual poetry, the result of chance encounters between the artist and the things that surround him, the funny things he discovers, random found objects and a myriad of other possible influences, ranging from jazz music, philosophy and drawings (both his own and those of others) to language, advertising and humour. And art itself, of course. If Swennen’s paintings had a meaning, it would be, in the words of the writer Hans Theys, ‘in a material sense, not in the form of a code that needs to be deciphered.’ This is a large part of their mystery and allure. Swennen, by his own admission, paints the most difficult subject of all: anything and everything, a form of creative ‘whatsoever’. But always in an indeterminate time-frame and space, devoid of perspectival elements, uncoupled from reality and the material world, free of all conventional associations. Which is liberating and means that neither the work, nor the artist, is compelled to express or prove anything, be it emotion or narrative. But on the other hand, the paintings allude to universal truths: about what it means to be a painter, and what to paint and how. Swennen paints every day, but many of his works, for all their apparent simplicity and spontaneity, are the result of a never-ending process of catalytic consequences and chain reactions: one thing leads to another, this colour suggests that, the unpremeditated actions of the artist giving rise to unexpected results that, in turn, set fresh ideas in motion. Each canvas is thus an exercise in painting, and every work can be seen as a living, multi-dimensional space: a place where ‘the artist simultaneously moves, thinks and acts’. Swennen’s works are akin to thought processes writ large, a stream of consciousness that is given material form through deceptively simple means: paint and canvas, colour and texture. And thus the painting becomes both object and subject: a material entity unto itself in which the ‘how’ determines the ‘what’ and becomes the hic, haec, hoc*.

* The Latin demonstrative for ‘this’, in its masculine, feminine and neutral forms.

This exhibition coincides with the publication of two new, comprehensive books on Walter Swennen's work by Hans Theys: *Hic Haec Hoc* (published by Xavier Hufkens, English, 240 p.) and *Ne Quid Nimis* (published by Zonder titel, Dutch, French, 304 p.).

Walter Swennen was born in 1946 in Brussels. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Ein perfektes Alibi*, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Dusseldorf, Germany (2015); *Continuer*, Culturgest, Lisbon, Portugal (2013); *So Far So Good*, WIELS, Brussels, Belgium (2013) and *Garibaldi Slept Here*, Kunstverein Freiburg, Germany (2011).

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