

In Search of the Phoenix

Eefje Van den Brande exhibits at the Warande (Turnhout) 2021

Standing in front of a work by Eefje Van den Brande, you see first of all a frenetic explosion of colour. It takes some time to process all the visual stimuli that come at you in one uncontrolled gush. When the whole thing has come to a standstill in your brain, you can start exploring. Fabulous creatures, swinging lianas, spiral staircases and rorschach spots take you through a personal and collective rebirth.

It always starts with a stain, made of ecoline. When this has dried in its own unique way, on a layer of acrylic, Eefje Van den Brande takes her brush. She closes her eyes and, in a flowing, intuitive movement, applies a number of meandering, brightly coloured lines. She does not shy away from fluorescent colours either. Then she listens to the canvas, to the form. What does it still need, what presents itself? Which shadows or symbols work their way up? It can be a bird, a face, a horse, a hand reaching out, a skull, and usually a hybrid of all these. Figuration and abstraction mingle to form a chimera, which could only come into being in her own highest imagination.

Eefje Van den Brande also imagines colours in advance, before they make their way to the canvas. What will work and what won't? It is a constant conversation, between the artist and her work. Sometimes the conversation falls silent, the fear of failure takes over for a moment. Thinking intervenes and stops the unconscious flow. Then the painting is allowed to rest for a few days, waiting for a new, unbiased look. Finally, the confidence returns and the last, often very exuberant, touches follow. She is led, lets herself be led. Again and again, the artist goes through this intensive process, like a phoenix, which is allowed to rise with each painting, out of doubt and restraint.

After all, many of these works were created from the first lockdown, in spring 2020. Whereas Eefje Van den Brande had often painted dark, introverted works before that, this challenging period in all of our lives brought her to a completely different, more dynamic style. Darkness made way for light, the introverted made way for extroversion and splashes of colour. Colours that she explores one by one in a series. Her own metamorphosis preceded that of the world; she broke free from modesty, from melancholy, in order to shine brightly in her own way.

Feeling is a guiding principle, as is her love of animals, with which she has a deep and natural connection. It is often only afterwards that it becomes clear which emotion has worked its way to the surface from her subconscious. The paintings are mirrors, which tell her something about her soul. The shadows of the past are still visible, in some dark spots, but are counterbalanced by cheerfulness. The works of Eefje Van den Brande give energy, charge you, light up your body, heart and brain. Since they are multi-interpretable, they are also a mirror for you as a viewer.

Which path do you take? That is entirely up to you. There are countless ways to navigate through her work. There are also infinite journeys you can make through it. She herself is still surprised by her work. It tells her something different with every revision. That is all she wants for her viewers: surprise. She hopes to provide tools for our times. The ability to see points of light, despite the many challenges. The need for connection, the desire for freedom and the importance of hope. Do we let go of old habits, to be reborn like the phoenix, with a greater awareness of what is really important? Eefje Van den Brande shows you the way.