

## LOCUS AMOENUS

Brousse Hasselt

Artist Stefan Peters (°1978, Hasselt) has a particular fascination for the language of paint and the essence of painting. For years he has been unveiling his own imagery in order to penetrate ever more deeply in the reality and his surroundings. And often we see the landscape emerging, in mountains and valleys, dense forests and shrubberies, panoramas with hiking trails along which one can get lost.

With the exposition 'Locus Amoenus', Stefan Peters is the first artist to be invited in the new meeting place 'Brousse' in Hasselt, which has just been established by UAU Collectiv. And where this house of architects, designers and artists wants to be a world for wonder and imagination, the idea of wilderness, the idea of a tropical location is brought closer for a little while. The brousse, after all, is not a remote jungle here, but a nearby, accessible environment where contemporary visual art gets a central position. A place one can return to over and over again.

The title 'Locus Amoenus' refers to the description of an idealised sanctuary in nature. It usually involves a beautiful, shaded meadow or a forest with a babbling brook surround by colourful birds and flowers. It is a lovely environment, an idyllic summery picture where lovers can meet or where you can be on your own for a moment. It is a safe place that you can escape to or long for, such as Arcadia or the Garden of Eden. It would give you the opportunity to leave behind your everyday concerns and take the time to muse and to dream. A contrast with the bustling city. An escapade far away from the routine. An accommodation against mortality. Freedom.

The central piece in the exhibition is the large panoramic painting, 'Backdrop0513', which is also the first piece of art from the growing art collection here. It is an almost monochrome, large format canvas (500 x 200 cm), painted with green colours and many layers of different transparencies. One can consider it a background, a green screen, referring to a technique to combine several images based on colour shades. The overall view of the panorama is refined and at a distance only appears to consist of light and dark nuances of green, even though much more can be seen in it from up close. Layers of acrylic paint, covering brush strokes, pink flecks of paint and pictorial accidents not only create a sense of depth, but also generate a certain spaciousness. The work may not be a hidden picture, but still it seems like you want to scour it, detail by detail, because you suspect that there is more to be seen than you are already seeing. It is not a representation of an existing scene from a certain region either. The search it evokes is much more indeterminate. And allows for emptiness.

The video installation 'Stage0513' that has arisen from this large painting, is presented in the cellar area, in the former vault of this renovated bank building. Various photographic close-ups of the painting are imported in a video editing programme as different layers and are virtually placed one after another. Because of this, the painting, at the intersection point of abstraction and figuration, becomes a digital structure of scenes (12' 50"). With indirect lighting, shadows and brush traces, Stefan Peters dissects, as it were, that which by now has become familiar to us. Sounds of Tibetan scales, composed by Eelco de Vries, accentuate a meditative atmosphere. The video transports us into a vacuum, where concepts such as time and space disappear.

The 'Vistas' are small imaginary panoramas that are constructed with gradients, usually from light to dark, and contribute to the illusion of a vast landscape. In this series, Stefan Peters has exchanged the canvas for wooden panels, which have been smoothed into an even surface so that the suggestive brushstrokes can play the central role. The initially perfect gradient is adapted and transformed by means of painting traces. And in that landscape we see mountains, hills, plains and forests, there is a thick fog, the first rays of sun appear to stroke the tree tops and one hopes to see traces of a human

presence. Once again, your imagination is stimulated to see whether there is something to be discovered. And whether for a moment, you can stay there yourself, figure out from a distance whether you are not just missing the landscape, but also its silence.

There are different variations of these 'Vistas' that often appear without a title. Sometimes they are presented as a polyptych, where every panel has a certain hue so that it seems as if the landscapes are edited with a colour filter, for instance from blue to magenta. They are not unfamiliar, those filter effects that can give your digital pictures a different appearance, that can make them more beautiful or interesting. And sometimes it seems as if the world can be seen from the sky, as if you can view the world from an airplane window or a high summit. A patchwork of grassland, steppe, tundra or islands and coastlines appear from the far horizon, give perspective and room for contemplation. To discover that eternity might be hidden in time.

In addition to the 'Vistas', a brand new series is shown that contrasts strongly with the panoramas. The so-called 'Relief series' barely contains any spaciousness. Unlike the 'Vistas', where an illusion of depth is created, that sense of depth is reduced to the minimum in these paintings. Just like in a bas relief, there is a noticeable difference in level, which is small and refined here, though, like a trompe l'oeil. Brushstrokes and painting traces have been applied in an idiosyncratic way, where only the texture of the paint is visible. Only the spray paint emphasises the thickness of the white acrylic paint, while it has dried up completely and has become almost completely even, and makes the whole light and tenuous. With a deliberately limited palette, Stefan Peters creates a rich and powerful universe through the direct brushstroke. These are images that seem to balance between painting and sculpture, between newscape and remnant, between contour and cosmos.

"Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson, [Nature](#)

In this exhibition, Stefan Peters brings us, via paintings, via tinges, shadows, reflections and cut-outs, to extra layers of meaning. The seemingly nonchalant brushstrokes can be read as a landscape, while the artist only very minimally manipulated them in that direction and composed them in that structure. Merely the suggestion apparently is enough to pay attention to perception and the curiosity to take a trip there. Still, reflection gets the upper hand. Dwelling on the things that present themselves, moving in an in-between world of different truths, keeping in touch with reality and fantasy, merging with nature or protecting her from our presence.

Painting is a way to keep that thinking process going, to keep it alive. The romantic idea of the 'Locus Amoenus' is not just a dream or a wish, but also an appeal, personal and societal. It is an ideal image to keep striving, not rashly, but obviously, a visual story where paint and nature are the main characters. And where the observer can personally insert what they see and feel and think. That intention of openness is an invitation. #nofilterneeded.

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