

GALERIE ONRUST AMSTERDAM

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Robert Zandvliet

Stage of Being

September 9 – October 14, 2017

Opening Saturday, September 9, 4 – 6 pm



Robert Zandvliet, *Stage of Being II*, 2017 and *Angel*, 2017

‘One day I’ll just have to venture into it,’ Robert Zandvliet once said in an interview, on being asked whether he would ever paint people. That day seems to have arrived. In *Stage of Being*, a new series of immense paintings on view at Galerie Onrust as of 9 September, the *thought* of a human figure, in any case, is present more than ever before.

An inspiration for the series was the *Rückenfigur*, the figure seen from the back in the work of Caspar David Friedrich. A clever ‘construction’, in Zandvliet’s opinion, by which Friedrich drew the viewer into the painting. Zandvliet is now incorporating this figure into his own work. By placing something that vaguely resembles it in front of one of his ‘movie screens’ – a well-known motif from Zandvliet’s early work – he catapults the viewer into his world in one fell swoop. This involves an ingenious play of perceptions, which gives rise to all sorts of questions. Such as: has Zandvliet actually painted a figure? Would it not be a matter ‘in the eye of the beholder’ to discern a person in a basically vertical form? Can the idea of a human being, or the human being as an idea, even be depicted? And what is needed for this? But even before possible answers present themselves, the viewer is swallowed up by the painting. The immense movie screen envelops us and, at the same time, opens up a panoramic view of a new world. From there we’re swept into

a shimmering silvery universe, or into a landscape that takes on a compelling rhythm due to the horizontal movement of the roller with which it has been painted. Where this landscape begins and ends is no longer visible by that time. For that we need to take a step back – break the spell for an instant – and gear our position to that of ‘the figure’ to whom we’ve yielded. Is it standing in front of the screen? Or in the midst of it? Or, as when Zandvliet covers the screen in a transparent layer resembling a vast veil, in some twilight realm?

The size of the work, combined with the virtuosity of Zandvliet’s painterly technique – sometimes stratified, then filmy – and the way in which he defines the space, inevitably bring to mind the Color Field paintings of Mark Rothko, the ‘zips’ of Barnett Newman and the absorbing sculptures of Anish Kapoor. All artworks which – from Robert Rosenblum’s point of view – go straight back to Caspar David Friedrich. Artworks in which the viewer can lose himself and in which time and space seem to merge in the attempt to attain the sublime.

In one of the last paintings of the series, the *Rückenfigur* becomes almost completely dissolved in the deeply saturated black of the screen. Only a few strokes of blue paint – or is it light? – break up the solidly dark canvas. Paradoxically enough, the idea of a figure emerges most strongly in this work. And yet it seems superfluous to question its presence here. This painting underscores the fact that Zandvliet has, with his quest for the essence, tapped on a new level in his body of work. Iconography and paint, the movie screen and the painter’s canvas coalesce and provide a vehicle for a deeper frame of mind. A stage of being.

Hanneke de Man has written the essay *The Metamorphosis of Paint into an Image* for the publication *Robert Zandvliet / Stage of Being* which accompanies this exhibition. There is an English, Dutch and German edition.

Galerie Onrust

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Wednesday-Saturday
1-6 pm
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