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Lily van der Stokker – The Complaints Club

1 October 2005 – 1 April 2007

From 1 October the Van Abbemuseum is showing a number of new wall paintings by Lily van der Stokker (Den Bosch, 1954). In this new work Van der Stokker complains heartily about money, people and the ‘scandalous’ way she is sometimes treated. Exhibited under the title ‘The Complaints Club’, the works have been specially designed for the museum’s tower space. With the help of a small display of drawings and a video the preparations and installation of the works can also be viewed.

Van der Stokker’s work has been variously described as happy, colourful, humorous, crazy, disarming and unashamedly decorative. All these terms can be applied unreservedly to her work. The colourful, handwritten texts full of arrows and exclamation marks combined with dull and uncool check motifs, bendy lines and various other decorative embellishments are still regarded in the art world as being extremely daring and provocative. But her work is light-hearted and playful. The themes she deals with are based on simple truths about kindness, friendship, happiness, honesty and family. Subject matter full of commonplace sentiment more appropriate in a soap series than in art with a capital A. Thus she subverts the prevailing view that art should be serious and complex, although without entirely dismissing art with a capital A. ‘It has been said that I have an anti-art attitude. Nevertheless I’m far more pro than anti’, Van der Stokker says, laughingly.

Her new work is all about gossip and complaining. A rewarding subject to complain about is the art world and its financial ups and downs. Matters which are usually discussed at length behind closed doors are brought into the spotlight in bright colours by Van der Stokker. Thus she plays around with the viewer’s desire for sensation while also posing the question about what is truth and what is fiction in a work of art. It wouldn’t be Van der Stokker, however, if she were to forget to apologise for all this complaining. ‘Consequently, it’s all a little bit pathetic really,’ she feels. And this is exactly the balance she is looking for in her work.

In recent years Van der Stokker has executed wall paintings in numerous museums, galleries and art institutes in Europe and America. Her work was recently shown at Museum Ludwig in Cologne, the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht and the MUHKA in Antwerp. The Van Abbemuseum first showed her work in November 2004 in the exhibition ‘NEDERLAND NIET NEDERLAND’, a selection of work by Dutch artists from the museum collection. She was represented by a series of drawings

produced since 1990. Her work was not part of the collection but was high on the museum's wish list. It makes for an exciting contrast with what has been purchased this far. In order to arrive at a well-considered choice to make a purchase, the museum invited Van der Stokker to execute several murals for its building, putting the museum passageways at her disposal. The artist's choice fell on the tower space and she created several murals especially for the space. These can be viewed until 1 October, 2006.

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