

GALERIE FONSWELTERS

Flare Perception Willem de Rooij

30 October 2021 – 8 January 2022

In the seventeenth century, it was generally accepted by scientists in Europe that white light is “pure.” The foundation for other colors. Only after contamination with “impurities” would colors appear.

The physicist Isaac Newton changed this thinking around 1700. He made a hole in the sunshade in front of his window, allowing sunlight to fall on his wall. When he refracted the sunbeam with a prism, it turned into an elongated ribbon containing all the colors of the rainbow. He then positioned a second prism in the beam, which converted the colors back into white light. From this experiment, it could be concluded that white light is by no means “pure,” but rather composed of a variety of colors. When part of the spectrum is removed, white takes on a different color. The human eye can’t even see pure white; because of this, every white has a tint.

The eight surfaces of the front space of Galerie Fons Welters are painted in different shades of white. The title, *Wand 01 – 08*, suggests these murals are the start of something bigger. *Wand* means “wall” in Dutch and German, but “staff” or “rod” in English. The walls are a bit enchanting; they are difficult to look at, sow confusion. In the center of this same front space hangs a square work: white fabric pulled taut over a stretcher bar.

Willem de Rooij, born in Beverwijk and currently residing in Berlin, has already made 43 works in the series. With *Whites* he is showing white for the first time. A small number of colors and sizes are used for the entire series, which in turn continually refer to each other. Up to now, it was pink that came closest to white. Those who paint know that blood red mixed with pure white makes pink.

A similar pink woven work is in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. In the context of a modern art museum, an association with monochromes quickly comes to mind for the practiced art viewer. De Rooij was educated in the doctrines of abstract painting and learned about the “color field painting” that was *bon ton* in the New York of the forties and fifties. Conceptual art from the East Coast of the United States was also the norm at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in the nineties. Yet De Rooij was more interested in the other side: the West Coast. There, women, queer men, and a larger number of artists who were less in the spotlight explored their own variations on the traditions. The pink work is playful and intriguing. It sparkles, as if in motion, and almost seems to flirt. But in the artificial light of the Stedelijk, this effect is somewhat flattened, as if it just can’t escape the weight of modern art.

Galerie Fons Welters is one of the longest-running contemporary art galleries in Amsterdam. In the second, larger back room is an exhibition by Evelyn Taocheng Wang. In recent decades, the gallery has always shown artists “from its own stable” in the back, while “new talent” has been invited to occupy the front. Wang studied under De Rooij at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. For several years now, the gallery has moved away from the original division between young and old. This allows dogmas and boundaries to be challenged. Which is something both artists do, too.

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The exhibition's title, *Flare Perception*, is an anagram – a rearrangement of letters – of *Reflection Paper*, the title of Wang's exhibition. "Perception" alludes to the way we organize sensory information. "Flare" is a phenomenon that occurs inside a camera. When a light source shines directly into a lens system – the camera lens – scattering occurs between the different lenses in the imaging mechanism. Its effects, bright circles of light and other distortions, appear in the final photograph.

Like the title, the material of *Whites* is full of diverse connotations as well. The weavings consist of synthetic threads and are handwoven. Since 2008, De Rooij has been collaborating with a historic weaving mill in Geltow, just outside Potsdam. It was here in the summer of 1945 that the Allies decided how Germany should be governed.

In their respective practice, De Rooij and Wang circumvent traditions and flit past rules and sensitivities. Although language plays an important role for both, their works are difficult to put into words. They don't easily talk about this themselves, and certainly not about the personal aspects therein; even though their work is steeped in their own fascinations and frustrations. Their works are not solutions or final outcomes, but an inexhaustible series of possible answers to impossible questions... Now, immediately upon entering the gallery, there hangs an unprepared canvas / blank projection screen, a virginal wedding dress, a diffuse pamphlet, or just a clean pair of underwear. What takes place beyond it?

The art viewer must look closely, and then perhaps sees that pure white doesn't actually exist, that reflection sometimes dazzles. The whiteness is simultaneously fragile and normative. The front space is at once silence and noise. Stagnation and elusiveness. What remains is the question of whether the white canvas obligingly absorbs all the references that frame the gallery or cruelly just tosses them back.

*Willem de Rooij (*1969, Beverwijk, NL) investigates the production, contextualization and interpretation of images through a variety of media. Appropriations and collaborations are fundamental to De Rooij's artistic method and his projects have stimulated new research in art history and ethnography. In 2000 De Rooij won the Bâloise Art Prize, and he was nominated for the Hugo Boss Award in 2004 and the Vincent Award in 2014. He was a Robert Fulton Fellow at Harvard University in 2004 and a DAAD fellow in Berlin in 2006. He represented the Netherlands at the 2005 Venice Biennale with Jeroen de Rijke, his collaborative partner from 1994-2006. Solo exhibitions include Pierre Verger in Suriname at Portikus Frankfurt (2021), Rembrandt's Mark at Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden (2019), Whiteout at Kunstwerke Berlin (2017), Entitled at MMK2, Frankfurt/Main (2016), Character is Fate at Witte de With, Rotterdam (2015) and Intolerance at Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2010). De Rooij has taught and lectured extensively since 1998. He is Professor of Fine Art at the Städelschule, Frankfurt/Main (since 2006), and advisor at the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam (since 2015). In 2016, he co-founded BPA// Berlin program for artists, and became a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. De Rooij's works can be found in the collections of Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; MUMOK, Vienna; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Centre Pompidou, Paris; MOCA, Los Angeles and MOMA, New York.*

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