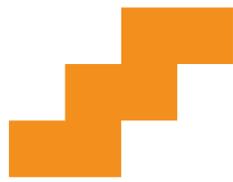


Marlborough Contemporary

Koen van den Broek — Cut Away the Snoopy

Koen van
den Broek
Cut Away
the Snoopy

Marlborough Contemporary London 2014



**Koen van
den Broek
Cut Away
the Snoopy**

**Marlborough
Contemporary**





Birds #101
2014
Oil on canvas
150 × 100 cm





Exodus
2014
Oil on canvas
118 × 115.5 cm

Torque #12
2014
Oil on canvas
180 × 120 cm



Torque #39
2014
Oil on canvas
88 × 115 cm



Torque #42

2014

Oil on canvas

150 × 120.5 cm



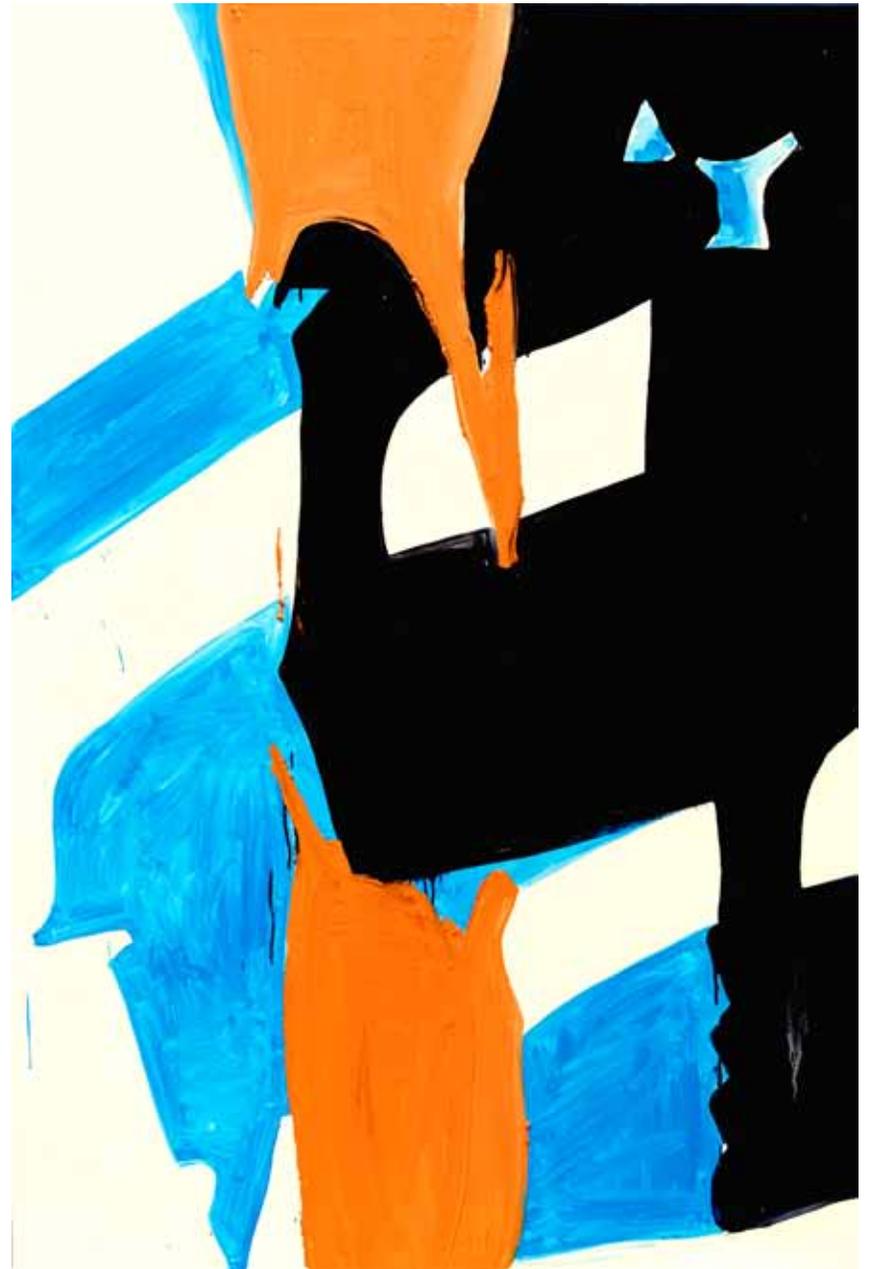
Torque #95
2014
Oil on canvas
118.5 × 115.5 cm





Torque #11
2014
Oil on canvas
150 × 120 cm

Torque Gate
2014
Oil on canvas
180 × 120 cm



**Chamberlain
in Holland**
2014
Oil on canvas
165 × 110 cm



**Study for
Chamberlain
in Holland**
2014
Oil on paper
70 × 50 cm



Street Painting
2014
Oil on canvas
150 × 100 cm



**Dialogue with
blue border**
2014
Oil on canvas
87.5 × 90 cm





Stretched
2014
Oil on canvas
210 × 140 cm

Mistress
2014
Oil on canvas
250 × 200 cm



Dialogue

'References can be a pain'

Koen van den Broek, John C. Welchman and Andrew Renton in conversation

John C. Welchman

For the best part of a decade your work, though often abstracting in appearance, was scrupulously wise to the street. You seemed to be working in the wake of those avant-garde artists and writers from the twentieth century who looked down and around in order to think through questions of motif and location and then bind them to form and appearance. I'm thinking of Walter Benjamin, who as Hannah Arendt once put it, 'bent down' in order to look, comprehend... and collect; or how the critical power of Proust (as Benjamin described it) did not 'toss the world up but fling it down.' Having dispensed with, or reallocated, the vanishing points meted out by roads and curbs, some of your new work takes up with figures of escape and freedom, referring to 'birds' and 'exodus': how has the focus of your looking changed?

Koen van den Broek

The first time my work was described as looking down was actually in reference to the painting **Red Border** 1999, based on a photograph I took in San Francisco. I considered it a landscape painting, focusing on the end of a road, with a lawn at the side and a red curb going up. This 'going up' was important as I was standing in front of a hill. That's why in this case there's no sky. And not really any looking down. Maybe a bit like Wayne Thiebaud or Richard Diebenkorn.

When they saw it, my artist friends reacted as if I was starting to evolve towards abstraction. As we know, when there's a horizon, we call it 'landscape'. But in this case we could call it 'composition' – as we learned from

Barnett Newman. The red 'zip' rendered in perspective made me reflect and prompted the development of my subsequent border paintings. In these works you are looking down at the street where the minimal objects that run alongside it are there to grasp for free.

A second painting, **Eighth Avenue** 1999, is just as important. I was taking a photograph against the sun in New York city and to avoid the glare I lowered the lens. Again, I got an interesting abstraction based on the street, curbs, sidewalks and shadows. By calling it **Eighth Avenue** I took the abstraction back to reality.



Red Border
1999



Eighth Avenue
1999

JCW

How did this play out?

KVDB

OK, let's jump forward 15 years.

In 2010 I was asked to do a huge intervention in public space – 7,000 square metres on glass. It was on two avenues of glass each 200 metres long and 30 metres high as well as a smaller area. The complexity of this particular structure forced me to abandon my usual ways of working. So I made a selection of existing paintings based on compositions and colours. From those I took the elements that appealed to me. The building will be a hospital, so we made jokes in the studio, like red is for fire injuries, yellow for madmen, blue helps ward off fever, etc. This was a key step towards my new series. I was working like a DJ, sampling my own work, which I translated onto canvas. This led to the first show of the new paintings, 'Chicane' at Marlborough Contemporary. As the paintings do not refer directly to any specific place, I wasn't obliged to confront – or deal with – reality anymore. I built on this new freedom. Funny characters seemed to appear in the shadows – birds, figures, hats and other dialogues. I became a pareidoliac, a seer of figures in clouds, in my case in shadows. I'm still not sure if that's a good thing, but it's more fun.

JCW

What's interesting in this shift is, perhaps, less the signal difference between your earlier motif-driven work and the recent turn to self-'translation' than the continuity we can observe between both ways of working founded on a certain commitment to found subject-matter. The street and curb paintings are products of photographically mediated encounters staged all over

the world – in Europe, Mexico, Japan, but above all in the US – that give rise to representations of specific pitches, twists and turns of roadways and sidewalks, their bounding apparatuses and the ambient light and shade that shapes their visibility. Some of the work in 'Chicane' and 'Cut Away the Snoopy' appropriates formulations that have already been appropriated and then invests them with a more serendipitous or impromptu array of subjects.

What is relegated in both cases is any transaction with what Clement Greenberg referred to as the 'optical' or 'all-over' conditions of painting, things that might be seen as purely visual, radically non-compositional or defiantly non-iconic. So while some aspects of 'Snoopy' – the comics figure who allegorises content or figurative reference in John Chamberlain's suggestive turn of phrase – may have been excised in the current exhibition it seems just as important that other intimations remain or are deliberately, if whimsically, conjured-up.

Andrew Renton

Isn't the classic problem of abstraction that there is always a Snoopy? Some resemblance or association interpolated into the work by the viewer, despite the artist's intentions. So if we 'get' the source, or see something we recognise in the image, we feel like we've done our job.

But what's exciting for me in these new paintings is that they feel freestanding, detached from any source or origin. And yet they still feel intuitively like Koen's paintings, and reveal affinities with earlier work where source or location was more explicit. So how to explain this? It feels to me as if a vocabulary is forming, at the level of painterly gestures. They have

their origin in curbs or shadows perhaps, but now they only reference themselves, and there's a continuity that speaks from painting to painting.

I would even argue this is the case with Koen's continued appropriation of Fouquet's **Madonna and Child** (c. 1450), which does resemble its source, in a schematic way. But it's Koen's scheme, and the gesture is now 100% his.

KVDB

References can be a pain, but on the other hand, so crucial. There's no art without them. I'm interested in Franz Kline's references, and when Aaron Siskind photographs an old wall, which sometimes looks like a detail from the surface of a Kline. 'Cut away the Snoopy' is an expression often used by John Chamberlain. I like how it offers a procedure to make the right decisions, to go to the essence of the painting... and it's funny.

To me, painterly gestures are just a tool, while a vocabulary comes naturally. There are studies of the physical constitutions of artists and their connection with the work – which might make sense. But this does not mean that one has to pay too much attention to them. Decisions are made, first of all; concepts are worked out. Later these things might have an influence on a painter's execution.

JCW

In the terms Andrew sets out, Koen, you have played a double role: for, initially at least, it's you the artist rather than the viewer who has performed the act of re-reading your own work by reading into it. The main 'Snoopy' you have cut out is the relay between a motif (say a road

surface) and its apprehension through some kind of recognition. But there's no question that you have added in a few Snoopies of your own: projected or imagined objects (like the birds); surprising allusions (such as the silhouette of Fouquet's **Madonna**); even a 'style' which is self-referring and identifiable – surely the most aesthetically immediate of the things you refer to with the notion of 'physical constitution.'

I don't want to be too Hitchcockian here, but I find the situation with the birds especially intriguing. What you seem to have done, in fact, is to turn Pliny's parable of mimetic realism associated with the Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius inside out. For instead of positing a trompe l'oeil realism of the kind that causes real birds to try to swoop into a work (Zeuxis' painting of grapes) to consume its contents, you have transmuted form that is partly found, partly assisted, into phantasmatic winged creatures themselves. In a sense you have fought off Aristotle (the key point of origin for western mimetic theories) with the shadows of Plato. Your 'birds' dwell in the ether of the shadow: they may actually have 'been there' in some 'original' street scene, flying or perching overhead and casting their shadows; or they may be entirely projected, read from the entrails of dark forms and shapes, and thus partly predicted (because they might have been there) and partly created by association. This is an intriguing situation that pushes much further, I think, than the normal associative scoring of pareidolia.

Of course, in the battle of deceptions related by Pliny, Zeuxis lost because he had deceived only birds and not – as Parrhasius achieved with his eye-fooling curtain – a painter's capacity to look.

AR

A painter's capacity to look, yes. But I think what's interesting about the process of painting here is that the translation from the street view to canvas is only in one direction. You could – at a pinch – extrapolate back from the painting to the street. But in the newer works, probably not. John, you talk of the witnessing, the 'being there' in the landscape. That's crucial to inform an aspect of the painting, but I have always felt that it was equally important to return to the studio, negotiate this foreign light of extreme contrasts from the measured light of Antwerp. Landscape and art history negotiated at one remove.

And, by extension, the work becomes about the act of revisiting the 'being there' through the painting. So it's not Cézanne in front of Mont Saint-Victoire, testing the micro-inflections of the light in real time, but an even more conceptual practice driven by painterly repetition, detached and deferred.

And that's one of the crucial elements, even more visible in the newer paintings – this form of what we might call committed repetition. Ethical, almost, to the extent that the subject is already less significant than the daily rigour of doing. Like Ryman committing to the white square and the infinite variations possible within that restriction, or Kawara's date paintings ...

In the light of this, Koen, can you talk a little about repetition and how that works for you from one painting to another?

KVDB

Just a small reaction on John's remarks. I do like the Hitchcock reference; I'm a big fan. Shadows, reflections

in puddles on the street... Think also about the first scene of Coppola's movie, *The Cotton Club*, when the suspense starts. It is a shot of the street, the gutter, reflections, shadows, and when the camera moves up, in a distance, the exit of the club appears.

Regarding the battle of deceptions related by Pliny: it happens quite regularly when people see my original photograph where a painting is based on. They think it's already the reproduction! Quite amusing.

There are more ways of approaching my work, and as Andrew mentions, there are significant different rules in the newer works. Regarding Cézanne, and this is the opposite of what you say, Andrew, I did have this conversation with Catherine David about Cézanne's apples, where I did my best to approach the conceptual side of the work.

You also mention Ryman, I would like to add Willem de Kooning, not only because he comes from my part of Europe. Think about him revisiting several topics, like gates in form of doors, rivers, paths... And of course his women! And the illusion of freedom. As Paul McCarthy wants us to believe in some of his performances that it's about the American Expressionists. Revisiting different topics has always been important to me. Like the cracks, the landscape, borders, shadows and now, in a way, the **Torques** and **Birds**. And rather than a direct reference to the real, this is more a self-reference. Trying different compositions, colours, angles within the canvas is pretty new to me. It is a challenge Mondrian or Albers might have experienced. Except now we are in 2014, and have the beauty, and at the same time the burden, of all we know of art history since then. Also designing on a computer, working

digitally, is new. I do think repetition is important to me. It's like a frame I am working in. As Fellini once put it: the limitation of working in a frame prevents you from getting lost and superficial.

JCW

How does this tie in with your two most recent paintings which in a sense return us to the street with allusions to works by John Chamberlain?

KVDB

Taking photos is a continuous act while I am traveling, although my work procedure is different nowadays in the studio. Recently I was at Dia: Beacon, where I took some photographs of Chamberlain's sculptures, in just the same way that I would photograph a gas station or another detail on the street. One looks like a blood splatter, the other one like crashed cars. On the road again!

May 2014

Koen van den Broek

Born

1973, Bree, Belgium

Lives and works

Antwerp, Belgium

Education

1991 – 93 Ir. Architect, K.U. Leuven

1993–95 Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp

1995–97 Academy of Visual Arts St. Joost, Breda

1997–00 Higher Institute of Fine Arts Flanders (H.I.S.K Flanders), Antwerp

Selected Solo Shows

- 2014 Armco, Figge van Rosen Galerie, Cologne
- 2013 Yaw, Gallery Greta Meert, Brussels
Apex, Friedman Benda Gallery, New York
Werkschau, Gallery Baton, Leipzig
- 2012 Chicane, Marlborough Contemporary, London
Koen van den Broek, From the East to the West and Back, Gallery Baton, Seoul
Shadows, Museo Alto Garda – Arco, Palazzo dei Panni
- 2011 Koen van den Broek, Insomnia and the Greenhouse, Friedman Benda Gallery, New York
Koen van den Broek, Comin' Down, Figge von Rosen Gallery, Berlin
- 2010 What?, Greta Meert Gallery, Brussels
Journey, Figge von Rosen Gallery, Cologne
Curbs & Cracks, S.M.A.K., Ghent
Preview, Works on Paper by Koen van den Broek, Royal Museum of Fine Arts (KMSKA), Antwerp
- 2009 Koen van den Broek, 'Shadows of time' Black Polyurethane on inox, MDD, Deurle
- 2008 This an example of that, collaboration with John Baldessari, Greta Meert Gallery, Brussels
This an example of that, collaboration with John Baldessari, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht
Out of Space, Figge von Rosen, Cologne
Who will lead us?, Art Brussels, (winner of the illy Prize), Brussels
- 2007 Angle, White Cube, London
- 2006 Dante's View, Figge von Rosen Gallery, Cologne
Project St Lucas Ghent, Vlaamse Bouwmeester, Ghent
- 2005 Paintings from the USA and Japan, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle
- 2004 Koen van den Broek, 1999 – 2004, DA2 Salamanca, Salamanca
- 2003 Threshold, White Cube, London
- 2002 Chapelle des Pénitents Blancs, Gordes
- 2001 Borders, White Cube, London
Koen van den Broek: Paintings, Z33, Hasselt
- 2000 Cultural Centre Hasselt
- 1999 Galerij Art 61, Hever
- 1998 Bernarduscentrum, Antwerp
- 1997 Galerie Hellinga Beetsterzwaag, Amsterdam

Selected Group Shows

- 2014 Nothing but good, Park, Tilburg
RE: Painted, S.M.A.K., Ghent
- 2013 Museum to scale, Royal Museum of Fine Arts (KMSK), Brussels
Happy Birthday Dear Academie, MAS Antwerp, Antwerp
Art Attack, Oud-Pand Sodermans, Hasselt
Works with paper, Marlborough Contemporary, London
De Modernen Duo's, Koningin Fabiolazaal, Antwerp
First we take the Hague, then we take Berlin, Embassy of Belgium, The Hague
Raoul en ik, Etablissement d'en face projects, Brussels
Collectie XXXIII, Museum for Contemporary Art (M HKA), Antwerp
Werkschau 2013, Spinnerei Leipzig (Gallery Baton, Korea)
- 2012 Belgium Contemporary Now (with Koen van den Broek, Patrick Vanden Eynde, Stef Driesen, Guy Van Bossche, Cindy Wright), Gallery Baton, Seoul
Biënnale van de Schilderkunst: De mens in beeld, Roger Raveel Museum, Zulte-Machelen
- 2011 Jan Van Imschoot, Koen van den Broek, Wilfried Vandenhove, Brandstrup Gallery, Oslo
Collectie XXII Ten oosten van 4°24', Museum for Contemporary Art (M HKA), Antwerp
Extra Muros: Meesterwerken in het Mas, MAS, Antwerp
Tomorrow is the Question | Collectiepresentatie, S.M.A.K., Ghent
- 2010 14th Vilnius Painting Triennial: False Recognition, CAC, Vilnius
Does city / Münster matter?, AZK Münster, Münster

- 2009 A Story of the Image, Shanghai Museum, China (collaboration M HKA Antwerp)
Fading, Museum Elsene, Brussels
- 2008 Fantasy, curated by Koen van den Broek, M HKA, Antwerp
Academia, chapelle d'école des Beaux-Arts, Paris
Biënnale van de Schilderkunst, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle - Raveelmuseum, Machelen
Take the doll, Aardenburg
The hands of Art, S.M.A.K., Ghent
- 2007 The Floor, Zwarte Panter, Antwerp
Vanaf Nu !., LLS387, Antwerp
Metamorphosis III, LAC Perpignan
Metamorphosis III, Museu Municipal Abello, Berenguer (Barcelona)
Welcome Home, Museum for Contemporary Art (M HKA), Antwerp
Jubilee, Museum for Contemporary Art (M KHA), Antwerp
- 2006 Open Space, Art Fair, Cologne
Beaufort 2006, Ostend
Freestate, Ostend
Leere X vision, Marta Herford, Herford
Between a Rock and a Hard Place, Kenny Schachter Rove, London
Leeftijdgenoten, Raveelmuseum, Machelen
- 2005 Royal Academy Illustrated 2005, London
Prague Biennale 2, Prague
p k m gallery: scape-code: their subjective topographies, Seoul
- 2004 Direct Painting, Kunsthalle Mannheim, Mannheim
Karel Appel, Onderweg. reis van Rudi Fuchs langs de kunst de lage landen, Centre for Fine Arts (Bozar), Brussels
This not a home, this is a house, Observatoire, Brussels
Framed, CC Strombeek, Strombeek
Koen van den Broek – Wim Catrysse, Strombeek
- 2003 Once Upon a Time: Een blik op de kunst in de jaren '90 in België, Museum for Contemporary Art (M HKA), Antwerp
Matisse and Beyond: A Century of Modernism, SFMOMA, San Francisco
Oorsprong, Brakke Grond, Amsterdam
The Ambiguity of the Image. Belgian Art Now, Art Athina Helexpo Exhibition Centre, Athens
- 2002 Wim Catrysse, Koen van den Broek, Leen Voet, Gallery James Van Damme, Brussels
- 2000 Prix de la Jeune Peinture Belge, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels
Europa Prijs, Museum for Fine Arts, Ostend
The New Millenium in my Dreams, Seoul Arts Centre, Seoul
Biënnale Prizegiving and Exhibition of Visual Art, Golfo de La Spezia, La Spezia 13
Presentation of the work of the laureates 2000, Higher Institute for Fine Arts (H.I.S.K.), Ghent
Open Ateliers H.I.S.K., Antwerp
- 1999 Subjectieve verbeelding, Huis Thuysbaert, Lokeren
Open Ateliers/Open Studios, Higher Institute for Fine Arts (H.I.S.K.), Antwerp
Group Exhibition: Synesthesia, Gallery Lokaal 01, Antwerp
- 1998 FAXX, Tilburg
Open Ateliers/Open Studios, Higher Institute for Fine Arts (H.I.S.K.), Vlaanderen, Antwerp
Spring 98: Jong talent in Antwerpen, Koningin Fabiolazaal, Antwerp
- 1997 Koen van den Broek and Philip Morris, Bergen op Zoom
Gallery Nieuw Brabantse Kunststichting, Breda

Public Projects

- 2011 AZ Sint-Maarten, Mechelen
Wielingen Square, Knokke
Provinciehuis, Hasselt
't Zilte, MAS, Antwerp

Collections

- Astrup Fearnley Museet fur Moderne Kunst, Oslo
LACMA, Los Angeles
Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle
Leeum, Samsung Museum of Modern Art, Seoul
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
S.M.A.K., Ghent
M HKA, Antwerpen
Kadist Art Foundation, Paris

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Cut Away the Snoopy
25 June – 2 August 2014

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Editor
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Dialogue
Koen van den Broek, John C. Welchman,
Andrew Renton

Photography
Studio Koen van den Broek
Artist portrait – Dirk Vermeiren

Design
North

Print
Lecturis

Cover
Munken Pure Rough 170 gsm

Text Pages
Munken Pure Rough 120 gsm

Typeface
Super Grotesk A Regular LF
36/36.5pt, 16/17pt and 8/9pt

ISBN 978-1-909693-08-1
Edition of 500

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