

PRESS RELEASE

Thomas Huyghe | My Private Property

January 15 – February 20, 2010

Opening reception | Thursday January 14, 2010 | 18-22h

We are proud to present 'My Private Property'; a solo exhibition by Thomas Huyghe (1971, Brugge, Belgium).



Image | Maggie (censored), 2009
Oil on wood, marble laminate frame, iron
205 x 145 x 13,7 cm

My Private Property

It's about private property and ownership. What is our own? What do we share? And over what do we have control?

Thomas Huyghe understands being private, when it comes to it. Private in resistance against the great madness that surrounds us and private in resisting domination by tyrants with all possibilities.

He researches power, with its game and rules; he researches the manipulability of things in a manner that impresses. Huyghe assumes many means to achieve this. Paintings sometimes framed in a grotesque manner, 3-D models of camera dollies or fitness machines; anti-social sculptures, installations or light boxes from which the advertising message has disappeared.

His most recent work is a 3-D print of a camera dolly. The work, titled 'Dolly (anti-social sculpture #3)', is a commentary on transformed images that are served up to us on a daily basis. Everything that reaches us through the media is made with a purpose by others. In this work, as in all of his work, Huyghe casts a jaundiced eye over the constructs of power. Because let's be clear about it, mastery over the game and its rules is what matters with power.

He accentuates this last aspect by placing the 3-D object on a sort of game board with 49 squares (A chessboard has 64 and a checkerboard 100). The base surface is also notably enough not black-and-white squares, but squares of fake marble, as is the frame around the board. The apparently costly aesthetic object becomes loaded through its manner of presentation. On a high plinth, behind a glass case, it becomes an icon of a portrayed reality that can be manipulated in its reading.

The title of the exhibition is taken from a new installation by Thomas Huyghe. It entails a depiction of a settled couple that look over their property in the form of diamonds. The depiction is on a wooden display and the diamonds are grotesquely executed in fake marble. Nothing is real. Yet a realistic image arises. A macabre image.

Also macabre are the paintings of some of the greatest power figures in the world. Overwhelming in execution and technique. He paints the relevance of power like no other, namely its public presentation and self-promotion. In the first instance, it appears that he paints portraits of these tyrants, but nothing could be less true.

He makes no portraits of power figures. He paints the public self-portrayal of those who hold power. And therein lies the power. Painting by Huyghe changes from a well-wisher into a fly in the ointment or even worse, to a prophet of doom.

Few were afraid of Madeleine Albright. She was the first woman with such a powerful position in the politics of the United States. Huyghe's painting of her will change that. The official portrayal power, mercilessly brought under scrutiny and painted *idem ditto*, displays the power of the manipulated image sharply.

In the depictions of Pinochet and Thatcher their pious auras might arouse compassion. But the paintings say something else. Many will be afraid to get too close.



Image | DOLLY (ASOCIAL SCULPTURE #3), 2009
3D-print, marble laminate, wood, glass
176 x 65,5 x 65,5 cm, photo Tom De Visscher

'My Private Property' is Huyghe's first solo exhibition at Locuslux Gallery Brussels.

In 2009, Thomas Huyghe participated in 'OBJECTSCHILDERIJEN (THE PLAYER 2.0)', Roger Raveelmuseum, Machelen (B), and in the exhibition 'FADING', Museum Elsene, Brussels (B), curator S. Vanderstichelen.

The following collections acquired works by Thomas Huyghe (selection): Nationale Bank van Belgie, Brussels (B), Vlaams Parlement, Brussels (B), Stedelijk Museum, Kortrijk (B), Provincie West- & Oost-Vlaanderen (B), Collectie stad Vlissingen (NL), various private and institutional collections.

The Art of Refusal, a text by Rolf Quaghebeur, De Witte Zaal (Ghent), Artistic Advisor Vlaams Bouwmeester, forms part of this press release.

Location

Locuslux Gallery
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The press is kindly invited for the opening reception on Thursday January 14, 2010 (18-22h) or by appointment.

The artist will be present during the opening reception.

Openingshours: Wed – Fri 14-19h, Sat 12-18h, and by appointment.

Text by Rolf Quaghebeur, Sept 2009

The art of refusal

Thomas Huyghe's whole practice actually stems from an act of refusal. Already in his first works, in the early 2000s, he was probing the media-based boundaries of painting by working on unusual grounds and in making use of fragmentary figurative iconography. The first refusal in his work, which is still present in the work today, is the refusal to conform to any classical painterly pattern of expectation.

Realising that virtuosic painting is possible, but not much of a challenge, he began to pervert his own virtuosity. Not in the manner of the Neue Wilden for example, who, in the 1980s, suddenly began to paint in a raw and naive way. Huyghe's attitude is subtler and could well be more intelligent. He uses the advantages and means offered by the medium, and does not so much wish to go counter to it, but rather to subvert it to his own ends. This is manifested most clearly in a series of works, among them the *Sun Chariots*: he paints the often laughing faces onto a ground of convex surfaces, and imposes the laws of form on them. But also in more recent works, such as the splendid painting of the terrorist Moqtada Al-Sadr "*Moqtada (Censored)*, 2009", a similarly focused and forthright refusal can be felt.

He very consciously divides the canvas into four parts, and instead of building up the painting in a logical way, according to the appropriate principles of painting, he paints segment per segment. In this way the work not only becomes "imperfect" but the aspect of time starts to play a role. One notices, for example, that there are subtle nuances of difference in colour and form between the various segments. Moreover, by simply not painting the last quarter, he is as if were censoring his own image.

Huyghe's refusal goes beyond a purely painterly and medium-based discourse. Where in earlier works one could speak of a search for and a probing of the boundaries of painting, in recent works his dealings with these issues are much lighter.

The search and the insecurity have made way for a greater accuracy that allow the artist to also add a variety of forms and elements to his work. This does not only have as a consequence that his paintings are increasingly becoming installations, but mainly that these installations constantly engage with the reality outside of the image. Thomas Huyghe's work, in other words, is obtaining an increasingly pronounced political dimension, which is less the result of a specific configuration than of the interplay between formal and iconographic choices.

An important element in this is the frames that he uses for his pieces. In his most recent work the frame tends to consist of beige or grey-black imitation marble, a shiny laminate that generally fits in environments dictated by a perceived lack of taste. Here too the artist is aiming at a dual effect. The frames are so prominently present and well finished, that they are attractive, despite themselves. At the same time, in all their artificiality, they are repellent.

Huyghe himself says that he is fascinated by power. How can it be that someone like Mugabe succeeds in dominating a country like Zimbabwe for years? Why is a character like Philippe Dewinter so popular? Wherein resides Madeleine Albright's might? By focusing on the face and literally painting out the inside of the mouth (Board of control, 2009), the emphasis comes to lie very strongly on the eyes and the facial expression. As a viewer, you not only discover the natural charisma of such characters, but the emphasis also comes to lie on the enjoyment of power they emanate and which brought or will bring them to a fall.

The frame in those works has a double function. On the one hand they objectify the painting. You stand outside it as a viewer, or, better still, the characters become isolated from reality and get caught within the painting. Huyghe creates distance. By creating distance he at the same time facilitates insight.

His entire oeuvre functions as a mask that unmask our illusions in a disturbing manner. He confronts us with the fragments of reality that should at the very least move us to question our own position.

Rolf Quaghebeur
September 2009