

The captivating art of Peter van den Borne

‘I would have to do something technical instead’



Peter van den Borne with 'Reflections'. A woman looks down; she's thinking, reflecting. This reflection can also be seen in the silver ball in which the painter who is painting her is also visible. The control displayed by the perfectly painted body is in contrast with the apparently rough background.

EERSEL – The withdrawn, shy little boy who lived in his own world with his paint box is long gone. Although...his sense of amazement and perfectionism haven't left him, it's just that his talent and self-confidence have continued to develop. There's no stopping Peter van den Borne once he starts talking about painting and the painting lessons he gives. These two things go hand in hand for him. His students are exhibiting their work until 9 March in the 'de Acht Zaligheden' Museum.

He only began to develop his painting talent at a later age. Peter van den Borne (49) has only been painting full-time for about five years. He does extremely detailed still lifes and portraits, and fantastical, lifelike paintings that can be ascribed

to the genre of magical realism. This is what Peter van den Borne has to say in his enthusiastic tones, 'I was a bit of a shy, withdrawn little boy, but I was really good at entertaining myself. As a child, the main thing you crave is the love and attention

of your parents. I got this by drawing well, and it meant that I consequently tried even harder to create something even better. I think this fed my perfectionist leanings. I always knew I was talented. At primary school I already told all and sundry that I wanted to go to the art academy. My parents didn't think it was a good idea, though. They saw artists as rebellious good-for-nothings. A test at primary school showed that I was good at drawing but not good enough for the art academy. I was good with my hands, so I would have to do something technical instead.'

Until 2003, Van den Borne worked in the field of electrical engineering as a mechanic, work planner and project manager. He was always a perfectionist here too, 'I really enjoy working, and what I do must be good.' When, after a number of reorganisations, more and more concessions were made to the quality of his work and the emphasis increasingly came to lie upon tempo he decided the time was ripe to devote himself to painting.

He now has a school in which he teaches classic contemporary realism. He teaches half-day sessions to six classes of eight students. He dedicates the rest of his time to his own painting. For him, teaching and his own painting go hand in hand, 'I inspire my students and they inspire me. When I return home after the lessons, I'm bursting with energy to start work. I get so many ideas from my students.

'Teaching means being aware of what you do and how you do it. Only very few painters can explain exactly how they create a painting. I'm one of the few who can. Sometimes they ask me to do a painting at the end of a course. I do that and then they see that I do exactly the same as what they have learnt themselves.'

Looking is an activity

'The main thing I try to teach my students is to look: to look at form, colour, light and dark, and composition. To look is an activity. Look at that little creamer bottle. What do you see? Exactly! It's the colour of the background because it's transparent. It's symmetrical: if you draw a vertical line through the middle, you'll see that

left and right are the same. And look at this painting. The egg in the foreground has been painted lighter than the one in the background; light is close by, dark is further away. Then the composition is important. What makes it interesting is if contrasts are present. A landscape with a grey sky is likely to be considered sombre, but if there is a sudden area of light in that landscape people are going to be blown away.'



The master's hand by a detailed painting of blackberry blossom and ripe blackberries.

Opposites need each other

Contrasts are the leitmotiv in the work of Van den Borne, as are likenesses. 'Opposites need each other,' he says. 'There's no light without dark.' Once you've been alerted to this, you then start looking for contrasts and likenesses and find them in all sorts of different forms. You find them in colour combinations, light and dark but also in texture, subject choice and symbolism: spring-autumn, man-woman, Christ-Buddha, child-adult, rough-polished or composed-accidental. Van den Borne's paintings consequently summon up a very special sense of peace, tranquillity and magic. 'Take, for example, this little painting of a pot of India Ink, a dip pen, a piece of paper and a red nasturtium. What do you think will be written in that letter that is lying there?'

'Dear Mother,' I mumble.

'See! It radiates warmth. And what about these?' He points to two paintings of a crucifix and a Buddha. 'They symbolise two different religions that both pursue the same thing but in a different way. The Buddha sitting in his relaxed way says, "I will show you the way" and Christ suffers on the cross for the sins of the world. Or take this girl, a perfect body, painted in minute detail against a rough, uncontrolled, accidental background in which the drips of paint can still be seen. She is looking down and holding a cloth in front of her body. She is thinking, reflecting. This reflection can be seen in the silver ball in which the painter who is painting her is also visible.' In this way, each painting tells its own story. 'If students paint a subject of their own choice, I advise them to choose an object that means something to them. Then the most amazing things come into being.'

I think you should be able to paint anything

'I have perhaps between 50 and 100 works from the period before 2003. I now do about 20 paintings a year. My school is going well and I'm now looking for a permanent gallery for my work. I'm currently in talks with the Honingen gallery, which specialises in contemporary art.'

Peter van den Borne has well and truly found his thing. He's now going to focus more on painting models, 'I think you should be able to paint anything.'

His experience and skill have increased but his curiosity and amazement were always there; maybe they've even become greater.

'Do you realise how beautiful a blade of grass is?' he says, as he shows me a painting on which a torn blade of grass appears in all its detail against a Ferrari red background. Amazing.

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