

LILY VAN DER STOKKER



AIR DE PARIS

LILY VAN DER STOKKER

Born in 1954 in Hertogenbosch, Netherlands
Lives and works in Amsterdam

At first glance, Lily Van Der Stokker's works seem to display a certain irony, but it is actually rather a case of irreverence. The kind of distance and conceptual detachment in her work allows her to embrace a tangy flower-power and a gritty optimism. Van Der Stokker plays with the hierarchies and classifications between art and decorative elements, overturning the famous doctrine of Minimalism "Less is More" with a far more appropriate proposition: «The more the better»! Her drawings and murals are all composed of a set of elements: decorative motifs, colours and words, each playing a specific role. The motifs allow the artist to signify various registers in turn — feminine, childish, enchanted, frivolous — without having to represent them.

She has been the subject of several individual exhibitions at major international institutions such as FRAC Normandie (2024) Stedelijk Museum (2018); Hammer Museum (2015); New Museum (2013); Le Consortium, Dijon (2002). She has also participated in group shows at Palais de Tokyo (2023); Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (2017); Nouveau Musée National de Monaco (2017); SFMOMA (2011); CAPC, Bordeaux (2008); Fundacion Jumex (2006); Biennale de Lyon (2003); Centre Pompidou (2000).

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Jumex Collection, Mexico City, Mexico
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago USA
Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, USA
The Taprogge Collection, London, Great Britain
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, The Netherlands
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris, France
Le Consortium, Dijon, France
FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, Dunkerque, France
FRAC Aquitaine, Bordeaux, France
FRAC Bourgogne, Dijon, France
FRAC Poitou-Charentes, Angoulême, France
Musée des Beaux Arts de Nancy, France

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

I am here

Frac Normandie, Caen, France

06.04 - 22.12.2024

Lily van der Stokker has been known since the early 1990s for her playful, brightly-colored murals. Floral motifs and ornamental clouds are recurring motifs in her world, with an aesthetic and palette reminiscent of Pop Art. Meticulously executed in a slow, painstaking process, the murals are made from small-scale drawings that the artist prepares with precision. Comedy, satire and irony are the hallmarks of Lily van der Stokker's work. Text fragments such as 'Friendly Good', 'Yeah' and 'How' are often addressed directly to the viewer. Her work questions the stereotype of femininity, ostensible banalities, the economy of art and the everyday existence of the artist.

Underneath her cheerful exterior, her work challenges stereotypes of femininity, and tackles subjects that are a priori opposed to these formal biases, such as the economics of artistic creation, the validity of public policies, or the ordinary constraints that weigh on an artist's life.

In this exhibition, a series of large-scale murals and furniture highlight universal themes such as family, meaning and existence, as well as others that have traditionally been kept at arm's length from the world of "serious" art, such as the decorative or plumbing problems. Lily van der Stokker looks for beauty in ordinary things, including ugly ones.

Joy, well-being and anything that might upset these states are among her favorite subjects. She describes her work as 'Easy looking art that is difficult'. The apparent lack of seriousness of her art is in fact a militant stance, which goes far beyond irony.

In a discussion with the eccentric director John Waters, a great fan of her work, she defined herself as a "conceptual pop artist and feminist". That she is a woman who asserts herself is obvious: by outrageously assuming in her art clichés generally associated with femininity (pink, little flowers, ornaments, decoration...), she exacerbates them to better assert a difference. That her works have a "Pop" dimension goes without saying. But what makes her a "conceptual" artist?

Formally, conceptual art adopted a kind of "office" aesthetic: typed texts, photocopies, archived newspaper articles, dictionary quotations, photos documenting actions or sociological reality... She, too, uses words extensively in her art, but the texts are written freehand (in the preparatory drawings, at least), in a childish manner. Rather than aiming for a seemingly scientific objectivity, they emphasize the personal, the intimate, while referring to the conditions of possibility of art, including gender prejudice, financial limitations, the need to integrate a network of friends into the artistic milieu.



Exhibition views

I am here

FRAC Normandie, Caen, France

2024

Photo : © Martin Argyroglo



Exhibition views

I am here

FRAC Normandie, Caen, France

2024

Photo : © Martin Argyroglo



Exhibition views

I am here

FRAC Normandie, Caen, France

2024

Photo : © Martin Argyroglo

PAROLE. Eliza Douglas | Lily van der Stokker

Air de Paris, Romainville, France

10.09 — 21.10.2023

Her speech balloons or pulp, Lacanian quirks are shown in front of a wallpaper, available to order, by Lily van der Stokker. The latter reproduces a garland of pink pills, pastel abstract patterns, like an easy-listening album cover with its light-hearted, sedative properties. The artist has become a specialist in cute, low-key forms marked by a sense of existential candour. In this spirit, I fake Nothing is a series of drawings about nothing, although art that claims to be about nothing never really is... Viewers are sometimes too compliant to a work's discourse. The childlike patterns, acid clouds and babbling are a whispered response to the blunt style of her colleagues from the post-picture generation, Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. Her babywear or sandy colours simmer modernist claims, «goofing up» the ambitions of an art dedicated to grand purposes and changes. Her graphic nursery rhymes are adorable, with all the ambivalence they entail — between flattering and patronising attitude. Here, cuteness always lies somewhere between aggression and tenderness.

This soft, euphemistic, flexible, diminished or deceptively introverted visual language is nevertheless confident about its attributes: its pathos of weakness is in fact capable of producing extremely powerful requests. We are reminded of the exhibition This is just pathetic that Lily would have seen in New York at the Colin de Land Fine Art gallery in 1992, as well as of Courtney Love and her babydoll outfits, her blue-angel nighties as well as her babyish, damaged teddy bears. Eliza Douglas and Lily van der Stokker have embraced the commodification of pop, grunge and post-pop — their misguided candour and their ad merchandising full of indulgence and deceitful detachment. Just think of the posters that feature cosy spots and painless character to sell medication or carbonated water with digestive properties.

More indirectly, their aesthetic process comment on the obsession with contemporary language's virality. The announcement prevails over facts, the buzzword over demonstration, the headline over dialectic. All that matters is the fluidity of the message, its reiteration, its ability to take up space at the expense of compactness. It can then become tyrannical, its radiant wave shattering the time needed for reflection and doubt. Words and signs, driven by their kinetic power, favour masses and the multitude over individuals, whom they annihilate.

By implying that their work is aimed at the widest possible audience, Eliza Douglas and Lily van der Stokker produce corrupt flattery, mischievous nonsense and hard candy for presumably innocent adults. By taking slippery paths, travelling through interference — delegation, appropriation, reproduction and deflation —, the two artists contravene their initial naive, sweet and zesty appearance.

— Pierre-Alexandre Mateos and Charles Teyssou (Translated by Callisto McNulty)



Exhibition views

PAROLE. Eliza Douglas | Lily van der Stokker

Air de Paris, Romainville, France

2023

Photo : © Marc Damage



Exhibition views

PAROLE. Eliza Douglas | Lily van der Stokker

Air de Paris, Romainville, France

2023

Photo : © Marc Damage

Thank you darling

Camden Art Centre, London, United Kingdom

20.04 — 18.10.2022

The exhibition will bring together a group of works made by van der Stokker between 1989 and 2021, which address ideas of society, home, friendship, work, finances, illness and care; as well as speaking to this extraordinary contemporary moment. While some works have previously been realised in other contexts and spaces, others are presented across Camden Art Centre's galleries for the first time. The exhibition will also include a number of original drawings on paper and works on canvas produced over the last 30 years.

Van der Stokker draws her images with an exacting care and precision, configuring them against one another for the specifics of each space, before scaling them up and executing them directly onto the gallery walls. Her monumental wall paintings – with their distinctive colour palate and highly decorative motifs, including flowers, clouds, patterns and curlicues – play on apparently clichéd stereotypes of femininity, but her work has a depth and toughness that belies its saccharine aesthetic. For more than 30 years she has immersed herself in the supposedly mundane material of everyday life, taking seriously the intricacies of the small, the personal and the overlooked, while at the same time forging a radical feminist practice in a language she has made entirely her own. Behind its apparent softness and sincerity – once described as 'so sweet it can kill' – her work remains both provocative and radical.

Optimism, joy, gossip and the petty trials and tribulations of everyday life are given a wide birth in most artistic practices, whilst work which centres the domestic and decorative has traditionally been seen as the antithesis of serious contemporary visual art. Van der Stokker's work disrupts such hierarchical considerations, challenging conventional conceptions of artistic value and merit, whilst firmly positioning itself within the legacies of feminist, post-minimal and post-conceptual art. Despite its exuberance and frivolity, its disarming humour, and its bold celebration of the ugly, the sweet, the beautiful and the silly, her work takes itself and its subjects seriously; reclaiming themes and aesthetic languages that have been routinely devalued, derided and disparaged for centuries by a patriarchal culture that has consistently denigrated the feminine and feminised what it considered superfluous or 'other'.

At a time when we have all been forced to make drastic and once unthinkable changes to our lives, van der Stokker's longstanding engagement with the supposedly 'little' themes of family, relationships, work, home and the domestic, feel more appropriate, more timely and more important than ever.



Exhibition views

Thank you darling

Camden Art Centre, London, United Kingdom

2022

Photo : © Rob Harris



Exhibition views

Thank you darling

Camden Art Centre, London, United Kingdom

2022

Photo : © Rob Harris

Help help a little old lady here

Curated by Raphael Gygax

Migros Museum, Zurich, Switzerland

30.11.2019 — 23.02.2020

The notion that a painting leads a life of its own and is perhaps even capable of “thinking” or “speaking”, is still characteristic of (contemporary) approaches to the medium. We like to think of the work as a counterpart with which we can engage in some sort of conversation. A helpful starting point when talking about Lily van der Stokker’s oeuvre, is the idea that the paintings possess vitalistic qualities. Her colorful pleasing works seem to inhabit and invigorate the spaces in which they are executed. The text fragments, or rather isolated words, van der Stokker frequently integrates in her works, form a rudimentary vocabulary. Frequently doubling as the works’ titles, the affirmative phrases such as “Really Fantastic,” “Yes,” “Hoi,” or “Wonderful,” simultaneously directly address the viewer, further developing the engagement between the works and the viewer.

One can read these messages and wonder: Who is speaking here? The artwork or the artist? What do they want to tell us? The questions the artist is concerned with and which inspire her works arise from an interest in the mechanisms of art and the art world, as well as the intersection between art and life. What is, or what is not good art? Can an artwork address the everyday life? Can an artwork be funny, sweet, and positive? What makes a topic relevant to an artistic context? What role does subjectivity play? What makes artworks fail? And does a work that has completely failed have a right to exist?

(...) Those intended encounters between work and viewer, point to another defining element of van der Stokker’s oeuvre: questions about the passage of time and permanence. Murals, traditionally conceived as lasting memorials to glorify histories or religious narratives. By contrast an exhibition context—where the temporary show is the prevailing paradigm—has a very limited “lifespan”: most contemporary murals are buried under a fresh coat of wall paint only weeks after their public debut. Van der Stokker’s wall paintings are characterized by a contradiction: they present themselves to audiences as “permanent,” but their imminent disappearance is part of the work. Thus, her preferred medium, the mural, is one which investigates the logic of exhibition making, the ‘sustainability’ of exhibitions and exemplifies to a process-based understanding of art. Influenced by the ideas of the Fluxus art movement of the 1960s, which emphasized the artistic process rather than the work itself, the labour-intensive execution of her works remains a central theme in her artistic praxis. Van der Stokker’s wall paintings are based on detailed drawings which are digitalized and then projected on the wall of the respective exhibition space. The projections are adjusted by the artists to establish a relation between the work and the space it will inhabit. The projected image serves as template for drawing the curved outlines of the wall paintings. In a second step the works obtain their colorful appearance and in a last step all outlines are executed with one continuous brushstroke; a technique requiring a lot of skill and practice.

(...) Under the guise of playfulness and naïve optimism, the artist sets to challenge notions of “female” art, the “acceptable” form to address urgent matters in art, and romantic ideals of what it means to be an artist, by using her own visual idiom to deliberately counteract dominant art movements since the 1960s.



Exhibition views

Help help a little old lady here

Migros Museum, Zurich, Switzerland

2019-2020

Photo : © Stefan Altenburger Photography Zurich



Exhibition views

Thank you darling

Camden Art Centre, London, United Kingdom

2022

Photo : © Rob Harris



Exhibition views

Friendly Good

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2018

Photo : © Gert Jan van Rooij



Exhibition views

Friendly Good

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2018

Photo : © Gert Jan van Rooij



Exhibition views

Friendly Good

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2018

Photo : © Gert Jan van Rooij



Exhibition views

Friendly Good

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2018

Photo : © Gert Jan van Rooij

SELECTED ARTWORKS



Anything
2024
Acrylic paint on wall
678 x 339 x 88 cm
Unique



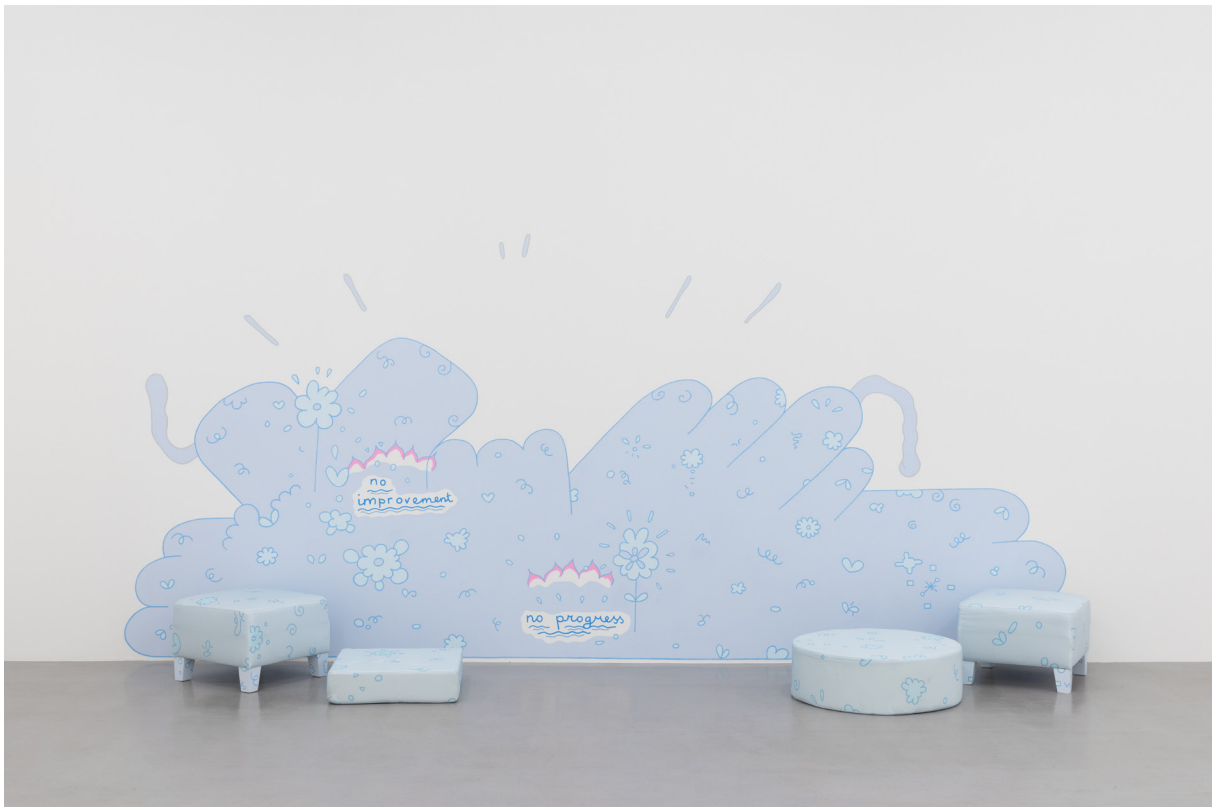
Retro Kitchen
 2021-2022
 Acrylic paint on wall, wood and polyester with mixed media
 200 x 304 x 70,2 cm
 Unique



All Useless Garbage
 2009
 Acrylic paint on wall and mixed media
 650 x 650 cm
 Unique



Childcare
1991-2019
Acrylic paint on linen and panel
282,5 x 360,5 x 5 cm cm
Unique



No Improvement, No Progress
 2009-2014
 Acrylic paint on wall and mixed media
 ca. 223 x 500 x 120 cm
 Unique



Hello Chair
 2009-2014
 Acrylic paint on wall and mixed media
 166 x 263 x 76 cm
 Unique



I Am Ugly
 2009
 Acrylic paint on wall and acrylic paint on wood
 260 x 330 x 100 cm
 Unique



I Fake Nothing
2018
Acrylic on canvas (after a drawing from 1991)
200 x 281 cm
Unique



Sock Painting
 2012-2021
 Acrylic paint on panel
 110 x 90 x 2,5 cm
 Unique



Yeah
 1989-2021
 Acrylic paint on wood
 37 x 41,5 x 4 cm
 Unique