

INTERVIEW. LILY VAN DER STOKKER: « MY WORK IS JUST AS RADICAL »

Posted by *infernolaredaction* on 7 février 2019 · *Laisser un commentaire*



INTERVIEW: LILY VAN DER STOKKER – « FRIENDLY GOOD » – Exhibition at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam – until 24 february, 2019.-

Inferno: *Lily, your show at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam starts with the “Tidy Kitchen”, a large installation of an all-over wall painting mixed with panels (“Tidy Kitchen”, originally made in the lobby of the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles in 2015). How did you come to paint two large texts “Organized & Tidy” and “Washing and Cleaning” in this wallpainting, wich as you say, are a celebration of cleaning?*

Lily Van Der Stokker: In 2014 I made a small object titled « Decent Tidy Kissy » (In the pink « Huh » Exhibition at Koenig & Clinton in New York) with on it a shelf displaying a roll of toilet paper. This work is for me a celebration of decency. This work inspired me to expand it into a larger and happy work on cleaning and organizing the household. All the text blocks in this large wall painting ‘Tidy Kitchen’ refer to experiences I had in my own household, like ‘a wooden spoon between the dishwasher door to dry the dishes’, or ‘pulling hairs out of the drain’, (yes who is doing that dirty work...). This artwork is an homage to all people, men and woman, who clean our houses. As a feminist I say that this is a celebration of cleaning. Housekeeping as subject matter for art. Also as I see it the work is opposing the romantic idea of the messy creative painter. So I consider this wallpainting to be an art-political work. The curator Anne Ellegood from the Hammer Museum called it ‘my most political work to date’ and compared it with Martha Rosler’s work the “Semiotics of the Kitchen”.

Can you please guide us through your exhibition trail, divided in five different parts: “Questions about art/relaxing with art”, “Friendly good”, “Family and Friends”, “The Everyday” and “Health Care”.

Lily Van Der Stokker: Five of the six rooms in the exhibition were organized on more or less chronological themes in my work from the past 30 years. Beginning with early work from the late eighties, “Questions/relaxing with art”, when I questioned as a young artist what art could be. I found out that I could make art from my mistakes, that artworks could be ugly, or sweet, and that with art I didn’t have to tell the truth, I could lie and cheat. In the whole exhibition I have put an undertone of a banal domesticity, like in the works about family, age and money. In the last and largest thematic room titled “Health Care”, I made two large wall paintings all in the same light yellow, with in it the names of my physiotherapists in New York and Amsterdam.

Your art career started around 1990. At that time, you often signed your work with the word “good”, or the artworks were made around the word “good”. In 1991, your first exhibition in a museum was titled “Good ! Wall paintings”, and your current exhibition at the Stedelijk is titled “Friendly Good” (after a wall painting of the 1990’s). Can you explain this desire to be ‘good’ as an artist, or an artwork to be good?

Lily Van Der Stokker: I think all people have a desire to make a ‘good’ life for their selves. In that time, the early nineties, as a young artist searching for something worthwhile to be put into the world. I was looking how to express beauty. I wanted to do it in the most simple and superficial way. And I made a drawing with the word ‘Wonderful’ in it, and put rays around it to highlight the beauty even more. Then in the catalogue of ‘No Mans Time’ (villa Arson, 1991) I wrote: ‘I am trying to be a friendly person and I want to make my art about that’. Also I looked at the artworld, at artists like Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Lawrence Weiner whom I all admired and who influenced me. And I wondered why there were no artworks with the words ‘Sweet’ in it or ‘Kissy’. I could also have said: ‘All I want to do is to be bad and make bad art’. Like I later did in my ‘Ugly and Terrible’ artworks. Good and bad are similar values for me. I am not didactic with it, I simply observe and celebrate.

You once said: “I am a beauty specialist. I have commissioned myself to research happiness and friendliness in my artwork, and with that I take a stand against irony and cynicism.” (villa Arson, 1991) Your statement recalls Koons’ ones. Can you please give us some examples/details on how your own work keeps away from cynicism and irony? How someone living with one of your works with words like ‘happiness’, ‘good’, ‘wonderful’, but struggling with problems, can see it as a surge of hope instead of a cynical scream. You once said that if your work with “Best Regards” text were shown at Disney World, where everyone expects light stuff, there wouldn’t be a problem. But in an art context, where every centimeter is freighted with implication, that same piece could easily be seen as cynical or aggressive.

Lily Van Der Stokker: I didn’t and still don’t intent to comfort anybody with my positive work from the 90ties. As an artist I don’t have an obligation to please and entertain with objects of beauty. Nor do I have to express truths or reality. That is a misunderstanding and an undervaluation of art by the general public. My work is conceptual art about beauty, optimism and the superficial. In that time I found a subject matter that was not present in the artworld.

My focus on the decorative and the extreme pink came a bit later.

I asked myself while drawing the words 'Good', 'Friendly' and 'Sweet Baby' why these words were considered dumb and childish? I made a flower drawing with the text "Nothing Really". A relaxing celebration and acceptance of both the decorative and the superficial. So I continued to research how to express nothingness, friendliness and beauty, and the best symbols for that were flowers and bright optimistic colors. The cynicism is really with the viewer, the art professional, who cannot deal with the fact that I claim 'sweetness' to be a grown up subject matter. This has to do with that women and their own specific subject matter have entered the field of art only recently. My work is a radical choice to show loveliness, like as for instance John Cage did, when listening to the carpeting of a box and he considered this to be music. My work is just as radical.

You have often used furniture, surrogate furniture or elements of decoration (sofas, doors, windows, washing machines...). Can you please talk about the dialogue your work has with John Armleder's pieces, and most specifically with his "Furniture Sculptures"? What made you work with this artificial domestic aspect?

John Armleder is taking the objet trouvé a step further. His is more decorative pleasant than a Duchamp I would say. These ordinary objects gain value by making them into art.

I think I am doing that too, but my objects and furniture are not found but more created objects. The Objet Trouvé in my work you could see when I use artworks of other artists as 'found' objects in my wallpaper or wall painting projects. Like in my use of the Donald Judd and « the Schoonhoven pieces » (Van Abbe Museum, 2009). Here these works seemingly devalue.

You called yourself a "conceptual feminist pop artist" interested in "celebrating female stupidity". You spent the '80s and '90s in New York City, which mostly influenced your work. During that period you were quite aware of the women's movement. You said that "the tough way in which those women (Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger) applied language" influenced you. You then started calling your work "good girl art". What do you think about the actual position of women's in the art world?

Lily Van Der Stokker: In the early nineties new minorities had entered the artworld as a result of the disappearance from the scene of white male art after the crash in '87. I followed everything in New York regarding gender and art. Exhibitions titled "Bad Girls" were in NY and in LA. And I saw new artists like Sue Williams, Tracy Emin entering the dialog, which was good. In New York you could see those decorative well selling artworks about their sexual abuse. I thought it was also kind of a dubious and easy attraction (for men?) to confuse this sexual openness with feminism. As an opposite I called myself proudly A Good Girl. Much harder to understand, even for feminists. Now two decades later I don't like my work to be described as girly anymore, because I consider it to be denigrating. If men make their typical male art they don't get the label 'little boys' art, although we could easily do that. White male abstraction and the genius improving the world is so past tense. The phrase 'birdbrain feminism' came from John Waters, I happily took it from him, because I think all female 'weaknesses' like, nagging, small talk, crying, emotion, embellishment, are certainly worth more research. What we regard as 'stupid' is really a treasure box full of power and qualities. Women have to be more proud and daring with everything connected to their sexes.

How did you start to use mistakes and discarded drawings in your work? How did you start to make works with texts like "100% stupid"?

Lily Van Der Stokker: In the mid 80-ties at some point I decided that I would focus on the more unintelligent parts in myself rather than attempting to become an intellectual. I started to use text in my art but these were private inner thoughts and handwritten. Small was more interesting than big, dumb and failures were more interesting than success. And I used my own mistakes as inspiration. I looked for beauty, but then also started to include lies and ugliness in my artworks. After '87 there came room in the artworld for minorities such as gays, lesbians, blacks, women. And the Loser, became a fascination in a world full of winners. Modernism and newness was discussed. Colin de Land made an exhibition titled "Pathetic art", I saw and read about it and I thought, 'that's me'.

Do you want to make the useless extraordinary?

Lily Van Der Stokker: Sometimes I add useless information in my artworks in the shape of text and numbers. Not to make it extraordinary but to create moments of acceptance. If I make a drawing filled with nothingy doodles and I add a text: '198, 3 possibilities' you are not sure what you see. Not much. We can be grateful for the absence of meaning as one of the essentials of art.

Sometimes you add text in speech bubbles, like in "I am an at Artwork and I am 3 years old", 2004. Do you think that these works are 'speaking spirits', or 'talking art works'?

Lily Van Der Stokker: Yes that could be since communication is important for me. The text reflects on the being and the position of the artwork itself in the space, as if these artworks speak and think on the museum wall. They have an almost human vulnerability. They appear slightly dumb and have a calming effect that I like.

We sometimes encounter apologies written in your work, such as "sorry". How would you explain that?

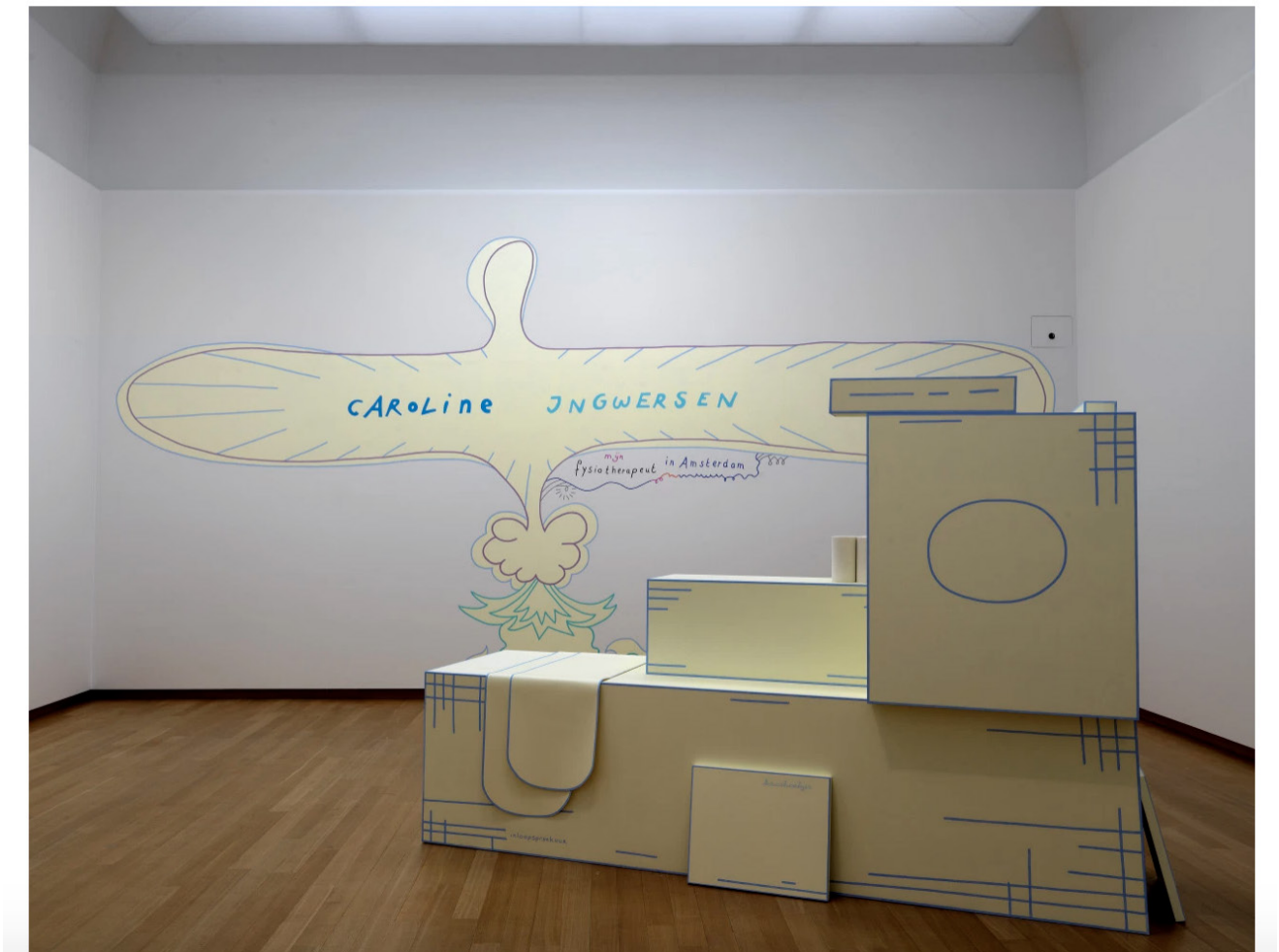
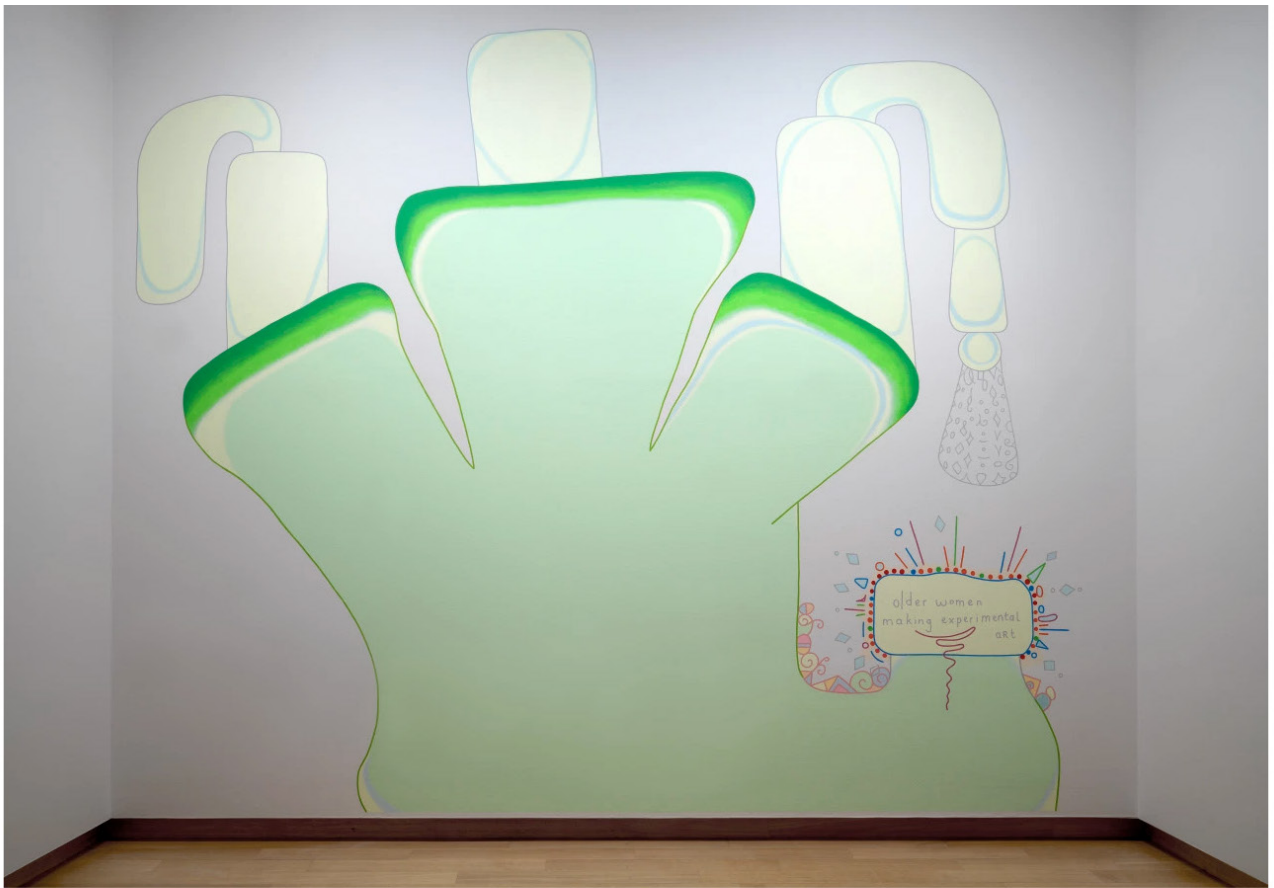
Here again the artwork speaks. For the lobby in the new museum in New York I designed 3 cloudshape blue wall paintings as if hanging from the ceiling and I placed them above the ticket counter with the text "sorry the same wall painting on that side of the wall (with an arrow pointing to the 2nd wallpainting to the right), I know it is kind of dumb". The 2nd one which I placed above the coat check, had the text "sorry again (heart) Lily". Then across the room, above the bookstore, in the back of the viewer, I placed another smaller version with the text "Sorry one more". In this artwork there are several elements that I find important. The words "sorry", "dumb" and "Lily". For me the work is mostly about making excuses and modesty. The signature is special because it is my personal first name and I think it comes across as friendly. It is different as a Picasso signature. Because I sign it as if I know the visitor, like 'hello I am Lily'. 'Hello Pablo here' that would have been different right? A friendly Picasso.

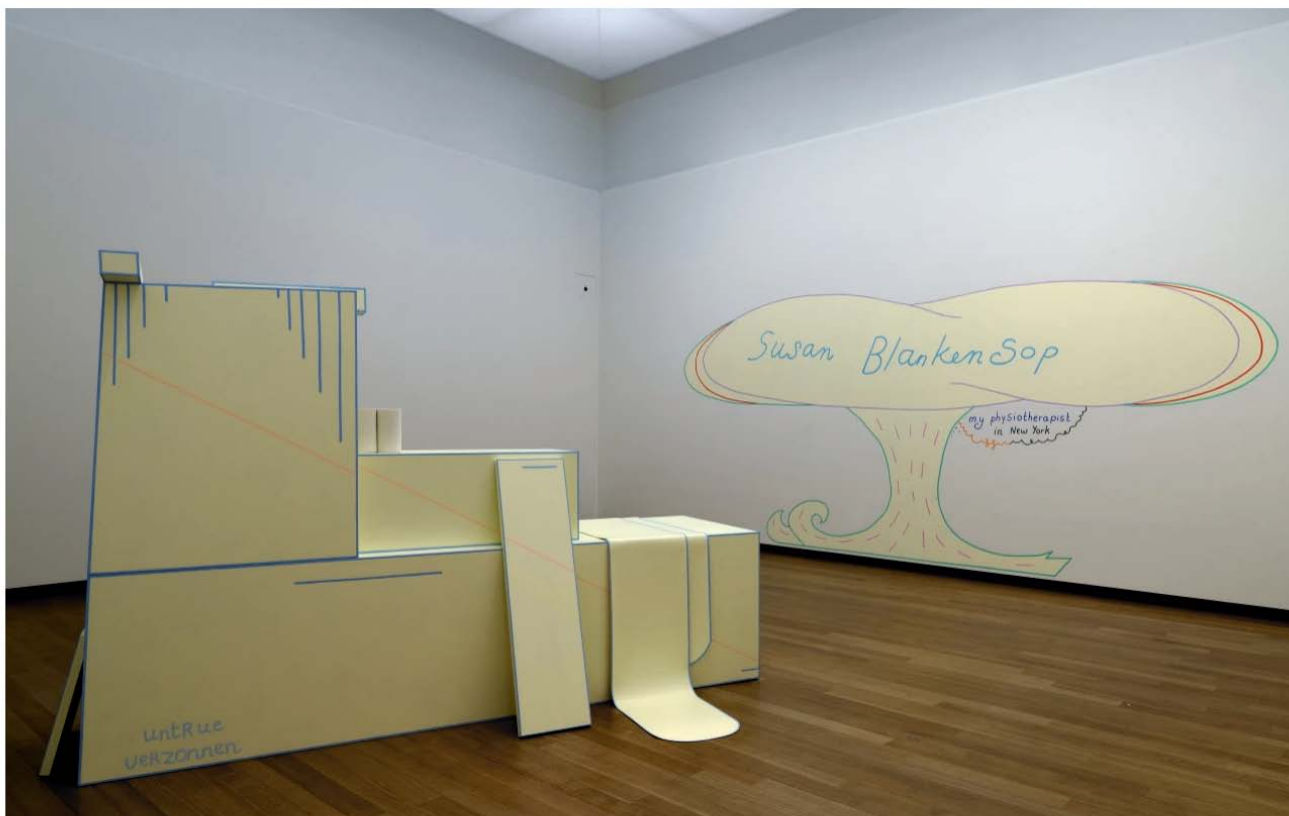
Can you please talk about the two new works you have made for your show at Galerie Van Gelder, a painting (« Here and here and here », 1994-2018) and a wall-painting (« Hm... », 1996-2018) ?

Lily Van Der Stokker: In the Stedelijk Museum we have a room with my early works ('89-'91), where I question the basics of artmaking and of the rectangular shape. We decided to show some more older works in the gallery. 'Here and here and here' is a magic marker drawing from '94 that I enlarged into a large painting on canvas in 2017. This work 'here and here' is reaffirming the materiality and the banality of the rectangular shape and it communicates directly to the viewer its own position in time and place.

Interview by Timothée Chailloux.







Images:

1- Lily van der Stokker at Stedelijk, photo DR

2- Lily van der Stokker, Tidy Kitchen, 2015–2018 acrylic paint on wall, mixed media, courtesy the artist. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij.

3- Installation view Lily van der Stokker – Friendly Good, 2018, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij.

4- Lily van der Stokker, Experimental Art by Older Women, 1999–2018 acrylic paint on wall, courtesy the artist. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij.

5 & 6- Installation view Lily van der Stokker – Friendly Good, 2018, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij/