

## THE INTIMATE SURREALISM OF MIMI VERHULST LANESE

To reduce the sensorily observable means as much as reducing love to the merely physical. Such an approach also achieves a narrow understanding of science, religion, and art. Art is then reduced to a strict naturalism, to a generally recognizable representation of reality. Fortunately, art goes farther than that, as its history from Altamira to Joseph Beuys proves. Transcending the merely visual is almost a constant in art history. Art reflects the thinking of the times. To represent reality in its all inclusive sense is impossible, the artist, after all, gives only a distorted fragmented representation, and even then the reality of the painting is of a different order.

Even when a dadaist or a cubist brings a piece of reality onto that plane, it remains simply an object out of context, which is precisely what gives it another dimension.

The same happens when Mimi Verhulst paints objects from her immediate environment. The artist pulls the chair, the bed, the dog, the terrace and other images out of their ordinariness by setting them within the confines of a canvas. Mimi Verhulst doesn't merely pull them out of their context, she calls attention to them and pierces their triviality. The spatial context in which she places these images is undefined, which lends them a timeless quality, as if Mimi Verhulst just wants to touch the essence. Figures, objects and their spatial context are permeated with a dull melancholy, loneliness, stillness and the lasting moment are palpably present. In that respect Mimi Verhulst's work calls to mind the metaphysical art of de Chirico. The approach of Verhulst is however more playful. Her titles especially pierce that apparent graveness.

The artist breaks this "flat" realism in the first place through the use of objects with symbolic meaning, such as, the metronome which symbolizes rhythm, music and time. When Mimi Verhulst combines the metronome and the heart, the ticking of the metronome becomes the heartbeat and the rhythm of life. The metronome appears frequently in her work, which is no coincidence since Mimi Verhulst is a passionate pianist.

The imagery of this artist allows for the possibility of interpretation and not of just strict literalism.

In addition to the metronome, the open door or window is another frequently recurring element. These gave depth to the work of the Flemish Primitives, but elsewhere they stand for change, for the transition to a different world. Such reference to other realities, such taking out of context certainly suggest surrealism. The combination of objects and situation which in reality have nothing to do with each

other or are precisely opposed or dissimilar, is a technique which unmistakably reminds us of the dreamworlds and subconsciousness of Dali, Magritte, Ernst and others.

Again and again Mimi Verhulst's work recalls Magritte. For example, "No more time" comes close to the "Time Transfixed" of the master, a painting in which a locomotive springs from the hearth of a dining room hurtling straight at the viewer. Hearth, mirror and clock also appear in Mimi Verhulst's work, but with differing meanings. Whereas Magritte's vision is abstract and universal, Mimi Verhulst portrays the personal and the concrete. The combination of divergent experiences à la Magritte is also manifest in "Home Sweet Home" in which the clouds in the sky turn into wallpaper. In addition, the smooth painting technique, the relative attention to scientific perspective and the imagery in general are unmistakably surrealistic. Nevertheless historical surrealism is more cerebral whereas the surrealism of Mimi Verhulst is intimate. The art of Mimi Verhulst is directed much more to one's own thinking and feelings, and one's immediate surroundings. Mimi Verhulst's art is anecdotal, but she is not inclined to tell the whole story, that she leaves to the viewer.

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ART CRITIC.

(Translated from Dutch by Gudule Gullikers)

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