

# Imaging the Invisible

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## The ‘*pittura metapsychica*’ of Yves Velter

*“...how a light flickered on and the two halves of a window opened out, somebody, made weak and thin by the height and the distance, leant suddenly far out from it and stretched his arms out even further. Who was that? A friend? A good person? Somebody who was taking part? Somebody who wanted to help? Was he alone? Was it everyone? Would anyone help?”*

– (from the last page of *The Trial* by Franz Kafka – English translation by David Wyllie, 2003)

## In the studio

Last summer I had an appointment with Yves Velter in his studio in Ostend. I had never met him before, but already knew his work since the solo exhibition *Serendipity*, presented in the *Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Royal Museum of Fine Arts)* in 1997. I vividly remembered an impressive, at the same time poetical and astonishing universe of paintings and installations in which scientific or industrial forms were turned into organic or biomorphic structures. The work had reminded me of *Arte Povera* or Joseph Beuys. I found it to be original, enigmatic and unseen in these parts.

Since then I here and there saw further works by Yves Velter, e.g. in group exhibitions but also within the context of a few psychoanalytical initiatives. What struck me time and again were a completely personal theme and perspective, as well as a great formal coherence.

The studio of Velter turned out to be on the top floor of a large empty shed, situated in a quiet street full of private homes, somewhere on the edge of the city. After climbing up the stairs I saw at a single glance dozens of large paintings, hanging up or vertically sorted out, sculptures in diverse sizes, but also spider webs and buckets because of a leaking roof. “I have worked here for many years, but now I am looking for a new space.”

Yves Velter came across as a quiet man, friendly but slightly reserved, who modestly, thoughtfully and immediately to the point formulated a few pieces of information about himself and his work. He was rather sparing with autobiographical data, made just a few remarks about his evolution towards becoming an artist and while being one. When I combine them with information I gathered from various texts and interviews, I can sketch a few outlines.

## A bit of biography

Velter’s father always wanted to be an artist really. When he was young, he drew and painted a lot, but because his parents wanted some security for him, he became a constructional draughtsman. After his studies he did still go to the academy, though.

The brother of his mother (Charel Delaere) was an artist and taught in the Antwerp academy. He painted sea views and beach cabins. In their genre these paintings were clever pieces of work. The feeling for the visual arts possibly resides in his genes, according to Velter.

A further important family member is aunt Trees, who suffered from a form of autism and from whom he discovered a variety of texts. As a child she spent most of her time in a small back room. A conversation with her was very difficult, but she did produce piles of letters addressed to diverse personifications of the Big Other: Chief of Police, King or Pope. Her writing proved to be a kind of *écriture automatique* (automatic writing), a jotted down *stream of consciousness* addressed to everyone and no one. They resemble the legendary messages-in-a-bottle that are thrown into the sea from the shores of uninhabited islands. It is absurd to think that anyone will ever find them, let alone read them.

Because the letters were incomprehensible, Velter started to use them (sometimes together with her personal belongings) in his work. From the turn of the millennium onwards they established themselves as part of his visual alphabet. *T.r.e.e.s. A coded story* (shown in 1999 in the NICC in Antwerp, see p. 62) is – as a symbol of inaccessibility – one of the inaugural works. It represents a black room. What is in there is unclear. It has to be decoded. On the edges of the box words can be seen. They set the door to the inside ajar, but only offer a glimpse of the contents. We all find ourselves to have a black box which is a mystery also to ourselves. Our brains comprise more possible mental states than there are elementary particles in the universe.

From now on Velter uses, for instance, copies of her letters to cover up or to represent the eyes or the face of human figures. Often regarded as mirrors of the soul, in Velter's work they are made of words which only make clear *that* they have meaning but not *what* that meaning is. The letters of Trees are in a certain sense characteristic for both the poetics and the Homo Velteriensis. Made out of language, they illustrate the impenetrability of the other *and* of ourselves. Somewhere Joannes Késenne praises “the seduction of the inaccessible”, which Velter employs according to him. Yet I do not know whether we have to call it “seduction” rather than “fascination”. Unless you understand “seduction” to mean what Arnon Grunberg poses: “What we call ‘seduction’ is above all the confirmation of the persuasions of the person you want to seduce. My strategy is somewhat different: I will destroy all your beliefs and call this ‘seduction’.

### Little other and big Other

Several works by Velter refer with their title to the Other/other and even more often to the soul (Greek: psyche). The philosopher Emanuel Levinas bases his philosophy on the transcendence of the face. It confronts us with an ethical appeal we cannot get away from. Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan does not talk about fathers and mothers but about the little other and the big Other, which they embody both at the same time or by turns. With this he develops a terminology which intentionally distinguishes itself from the general use of language and which (in our times of changing forms of society) also sets itself apart from social conventions or norms. The first is the other as sounding board or mirror image. It is the other-equal, the alter ego or in contemporary wording our *soul mate*.

The big Other then is the other in his radical alterity. It is the Other as treasure-house of the words (or more in general: signifiers) that circulate among the people. On the other hand, this big Other also stands for the hegemony of structures of power and authority that live in our unconscious. One of the most famous lacanian slogans probably is:

*“L'inconscient, c'est le discours de l'Autre”.*

The unconscious is the discourse of the big Other. From Lacan's structuralist point of view we are – without our knowledge – indeed haunted by structures such as language, culture and ideology that precede us logically and chronologically.

In art the external, pre-defined meaning of the big Other is being *deconstructed* and reassessed. This results in original and metaphorical elements that generate new personal and social meaning. Art is a means of finding (back) a personal idiom, by which we can enable our *self* to speak. It draws from the general use of language that belongs to and is shared by third parties. Yet it gives this a ‘wring’. All through his oeuvre the artist creates a personal dialect or idiolect and puts it at the community's disposal.

## Idiom and idiolect

It is no coincidence then that *Private Language* (see p. 241) is the title of one of Velter's exhibitions (shown in 2001 in Begijnhof Hasselt, now Z33) in which he incorporated the clothes, pieces of furniture and various knickknacks of aunt Trees into an all-encompassing installation. By means of her peculiar language Yves Velter from now on brought out the impossibility and value of communication. Her letters are a model for the own idiom or idiolect which Velter too developed by means of constantly returning techniques and symbols in his oeuvre. They contribute to a personal iconography where certain expressions and formulations repeat themselves again and again. In a certain sense it is at the same time cryptography, ideography and encephalography. It uses a sort of code language and makes visible things that are essentially invisible to the eye: ideas as well as the (ultimately mainly *mental*) space of our brain.

Autism like that of aunt Trees is characterized, as is well-known, by a triptych of problems in the field of communication, social contact and the imagination. Opinions about the origin of autism remain controversial as well as diverse. Today neuroscientific explanations prevail, whereas in the past more psychological ones predominated. With regard to autism psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim for instance talked about "the empty fort". In his view it was the result of a refrigerator mother and/or an all too intellectual father. Some authors about autism emphasize a kind of atrophy of the feminine, with as a consequence defects in certain capabilities such as empathy or intuition. In the Asperger type of the *idiot savant* this can be accompanied by extraordinary and/or eccentric cognitive capacities. In a manner of speaking Velter flirts with such an autistic profile or problem. Maybe we are all a bit autistic? His approach is rather intellectual, rational, philosophical, distant and contemplative. There is neither spontaneity nor impulsiveness. He is a painter of the soul and of the invisible: the Cartesian *res cogitans* which, in contrast with the *res extensa*, occupies space nor place.

His materials (typical for him: Chinese ink, mirror, hardboard, soil from his parents' garden, textile, letters, digital prints, blood, pocket torches...) are handled by Velter with a big "expressive control" (Mieke Mels). Building on what Stef Van Bellingen remarks: this control is formally characterized by a stylized but mainly 'economical' line sketching, the reduction of colour to mostly pale tints and black areas, an extra-spatial background of pigment which reminds one of plastered walls or the paleness of frescos. The compositions and sculptures are clear and pure and 'free from any noise'. In this way he creates an "atmosphere of doubt, because the unknown too is symbolised in his works". In his own words:

*"I have the feeling that I leave enough room for interpretation, so the magic of the work of art does not disappear".*

## Pittura metapsychica

Velter is as it were an opposite of Jackson Pollock. He is not involved in *action* but in *reflection painting*. First, forms and ideas take shape in his head. Only in a second stage he tries to realize them as accurately as possible and to find a visual solution with the strictly necessary and hence sober means. This way he employs the painterly equivalent of the razor of Ockham from philosophy: why use more entities when it can be done equally well with less?

In 2010 there was a solo-exhibition of Yves Velter under the title *Don't look*. Like any prohibition this paradoxically arouses a desire to look. After all law and desire are two sides of the same coin. Jacques Lacan: "*Le désir est l'envers de la loi*" ("*Desire is the reverse side of the law*"). According to Henri Matisse, the artist has to see all things as if he sees them for the first time. Or Paul Cézanne about Monet: "it is only an eye, but my God, what an eye". Marcel Duchamp definitively broke with this sort of retinal art of painting. He became an artist of the conceptual.

Yves Velter then can be called a painter of the mental. He makes representations of the psychological, he creates images of the soul. His eye is the eye of the mind. After the title of a famous book by Douglas Hofstadter: *The Mind's I*. The result is *pittura metapsychica*. This in turn alludes to the *pittura metafisica* of De Chirico. "*Et qui amabo nisi quo aenigma est?*" "What else shall I love but enigmas?" Behold the

question which was written in 1911 by the young Giorgio at the bottom of his self-portrait. Could Velter not recognize himself in this statement?

But there is also some affinity with fellow countryman René Magritte, in whose work we time and again see the same symbols reappear as well. Ethereally or esoterically they refer to a world beyond reason. In his work too the human being appears as anonymous, universal or uniform and wrapped in black. He is the alter ego of the artist *and* spectator, a bit like Mr. Cogito who turns up each time in the poems by Zbigniew Herbert.

Hans Prinzhorn (author of the classic *Bildneri der Geisteskranken* from 1922) finds the art of psychiatric patients to be exceptional because it is original and unblemished. It shows a pure creativity which according to him owes more to being untrained than to some or other form of insanity. Is it in accordance with this logic that Yves Velter expressly chose not to take any art training? Amongst other things he was trained in *scientific* drawing. This basis is very noticeable by the way. Velter moves between science and art. He searches for and examines the zero or primary state of things. According to Marc Ruyters he is a “basic artist”. After all he is not so much looking for proof as for traces. Freely rendered from the poet René Char:

*“L’homme de science cherche des preuves; l’artiste cherche des traces” (“The scientist looks for proof; the artist looks for traces.”)*

To be naked and begin

Yves Velter refused on principle to identify with or to be led by examples or idols from the world of art. In an interview with Hilde Van Canneyt:

*“As a child one has a sometimes surprising and down-to-earth attitude towards things which as adults we are too close to, because we grow up with conventions that include many aspects we actually are not familiar with and that are imposed upon us”.*

From the outset Velter chose invention over convention. In this context he uses a motto which is reflected in a verse by Paul van Ostaïjen:

*“Ik wil bloot zijn en beginnen” (“I want to be naked and begin.”).*

Together with other poets such as Rainer Maria Rilke or Francis Ponge, Yves Velter apparently wants to be a “Marc” who greets all things in the morning (referring to the title of a well-known poem by Van Ostaïjen). In his own words from the aforementioned interview:

*“Some influence is always there, when the source is life itself and not the world of art, that is. In that case I think that the chances for authenticity in the work of an artist are bigger.”*

Or also:

*“In that respect I am still old-school, in the sense that I consider authenticity, vision and originality to be a basis. The big outlines of the visual arts have long since been sketched, but there is still an enormous potential to be explored in the niches.”*

Since Plato’s allegory of the cave the same process has already been repeating itself for thinkers and poets. First you free yourself from the chains of appearances. After all, as long as you do not succeed in doing this, you remain under the spell of the play of shadows. Then you turn around. It is a conversion towards the source of the light. Subsequently there is a rising up from the darkness into the world of the true, good or beautiful ideas and forms. Once you have contemplated this to some extent, “*Du muss dein*

*Leben ändern*” (Rilke) (“*you have to change your life*”). If you descend back into the cave, you walk towards a difficult fate. There is the risk that you will not be believed. It can also happen that you simply get ridiculed or finished off. That is, if you do not stumble or fall because you have seen too much light and suffer from nightblindness.

After the art of painting had already partly been declared dead for a few decades, it went through some sort of revival in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Abroad with amongst others the *Neue Wilden* and the *Transavanguardia*, back home with a multitude of artists such as Luc Tuymans, Mario De Brabandere, Bert De Beul, Jean-Marie Bytsebier and many others. Just like the first mentioned, Yves Velter was initially in search of the status of the image, the form. Some of his works have something of an afterimage: that which remains on your retina after you have been blinded (e.g. by snow and/or high-altitude sun).

The following thought experiment is taken from the ‘*philosophy of mind*’. Imagine, for example, a pirate, in as much detail as possible. Then ask yourself the following questions: what is the colour of his eyes, what is the pattern on his shirt, what kind of jewels can you recognize on his fingers or ears? Conclusion: you have an image of the pirate that is far less complete than you thought. It is an image that only exists in your mind and differs radically from sensory experience.

On the other hand, think about the mathematics lesson. The teacher is explaining something hand and foot, and suddenly you understand *it* (often after a great deal of shillyshallying). “*Now I see it!*” The only real or ‘correct’ right-angled triangle only exists as an idea. Every sensorily perceptible one is an always incorrect variant of that.

### Philosophy of (the) mind

Apart from Plato’s theory of ideas or forms, the work of Yves Velter conjures up a whole lot of other philosophical associations. According to materialists such as Democritus and Epicurus, reality is made up of elementary particles or atoms. In their view thoughts, emotions and communication too are carried by material vehicles they call *simulacra*. Completely in this spirit, Yves Velter also represents the human being and his thoughts, fears and desires by way of lines and dots, nodes or corpuscular conglomerates. They seem to show a sort of organic cohesion sometimes. Like in acupuncture or Chinese medicine, his human representations here and there (that is: subcutaneously) display sensitive points and/or painful areas where our natural ability and our life’s history touch each other.

Art is often compared to a mirror. In the context of the philosophy of art Frank Vande Veire talks about a *dark* mirror, Marc Verminck about a *cracked* mirror and also according to the French philosopher Alain all the arts are like mirrors in which the human being knows and recognizes something of himself which he was unconscious of. Mirrors are used by Velter in many works, as it happens.

In the field of psychoanalysis mirror and reflection are essential. In the other we can recognize our own thoughts, emotions and impulses. In that way we discover the truth about ourselves, often merely through or thanks to reflection or a sounding board. Both are abundantly present in the work of Velter. The mirror, literally, but also figuratively in the form of water surfaces that at the same time reflect and hide the depth/the Other from view. The sounding board for example in the form of a piece of hardboard, which we can call *heardboard* in this context.

Yves Velter says himself:

*“The hardboard comes from the back of a cupboard in my home. When I removed the cupboard, I discovered the material at the other side of the cupboard – the back itself. At that point I made a link: that back is really some kind of silent witness of my private life, the object was not visible and continuously present in the house during the hundreds of conversations that took place there.” Or also: “It can appear in many forms, it mostly deals with something or someone that is a witness of an intimate story or of an experience.”*

On the other hand psychoanalysis is sceptical about the mirror, as it considers it to be a source of disregard and/or optical illusion. For psychoanalysis the journey only starts *beyond* the mirror. In *Alice in Wonderland* for example Lewis Carroll takes us to the other side. You do not have to be Sherlock Holmes to recognize this “wonderland” as the unconscious *avant la lettre*. This unconscious is the radical alterity: the big Other or the *alien within*. He bangs on the door unexpectedly, e.g. as an urge or a trauma. Or he takes us by surprise as an opaque, enigmatic signifier.

According to Francis Bacon the human mind is no *tabula rasa*, but a cracked mirror. In an implicit manner several idols perturb the way in which we experience the world: *idols of the tribe, of the cave, of the market place* and *of the theatre* that respectively stem from our species, from our upbringing, from that which lives in the market and in higher culture. In his *Novum Organum* he was the first to react against many centuries of sterile scholastic or Aristotelian thought. In the 68th aphorism from book I, he dictates that we have to renounce such idols “*and the understanding (must be) thoroughly freed and cleansed*”.

With his methodical and hyperbolic doubt René Descartes too pushes aside all traditional and/or previously existing knowledge in order to go in search of “*idées claires et distinctes*” (“*clear and distinct ideas*”) on which he could found philosophy and science. The result was, as is well-known, his “*cogito ergo sum*”. Is Yves Velter’s demarche not a sort of imaging equivalent of all this?

John Locke believes that we are indeed born as *tabula rasa*. All our mental contents are coming from our experience. Also the most complex ideas have an empirical origin. Sensory *sensations* and rational *reflections* form a conglomerate in the way molecules compose themselves from atoms. Is this not precisely the way Velter has tried to image them over the last few years?

According to Leibniz, living later, our mind is a white sheet of paper “*nisi intellectus ipse*” (“*except for our intellect itself*”). Kant will base his own Copernican revolution on this: reality is not a given, but is constructed by the previously existing and transcendental categories of pure reason (spatiotemporality, substance, existence, causality, etc.). In a number of paintings it seems as if Velter is trying to put these categories themselves onto the canvas.

### Ecce homo Velteriensis

Velter then does not so much create images of a human being or the human being, but rather of the human condition. In particular he makes images of contact, reflection, communication, consciousness, the unconscious. The states and tribulations of the psyche, the sharpness and rigidity of reason, the impenetrability of the soul. The human beings that are portrayed in his oeuvre are variations on the “*Ecce Homo*” (“*Behold the man*”)

It is only in the last few years that we find in Velter’s work a distinct reference to people who really influence him. There are the Ostend artists James Ensor and especially Leon Spilliaert with whom he shares to a certain extent a preference for existential themes or for black and other colours. There are the psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, the ‘*zielenknijpers*’ (shrinks, or literally: those who are ‘pincers’ of the soul) or (after the title of a few works by Velter) ‘*zielentemmers*’ (those who ‘tame’ the soul). There are the science philosopher Karl Popper, perspectivist and philosopher of aesthetics par excellence Friedrich Nietzsche and philosopher of the Other and of the transcendence of the face Emanuel Levinas.

The big majority of Velter’s characters present themselves not so much as private persons but rather in a prototypical or emblematic way. They are related to the lost figures from the ‘theatre of the absurd’ of Harold Pinter or Samuel Beckett. Their plays are characterized by an extremely minimalistic writing, and existential anguishes, incomprehension, misunderstanding, alienation and senselessness prevail thematically. They are set on a stage that is reduced to its most fundamental building blocks: almost a kind of vacuum where no human being can get a grip on anything.

Just like theirs, the space that Velter pictures, is also mainly or exclusively a *mental space*.

In his monograph *The often overlooked but every day observed* we find a quote from Harold Pinter:

*“There are some things one remembers, even though they may never have happened”.*

It makes me think of the *multiple drafts theory of philosopher of mind* Daniel Dennett: consciousness as a constantly evolving account of mental states. Or – given the essentially fictional character of our (not solely inner) world – of psychoanalysis as a form of science-fiction.

Every work of art uses self-imposed rules. These make the work coherent, but are above all a means of opening up a territory where the mind would not venture otherwise. Thus Michel Houellebecq considers rhyme and structure of verse a powerful instrument to free up the inner life, or Georges Perec composes a masterpiece without the letter ‘e’ in his novel *La Disparition* (English translation: *A Void*). Velter’s whole oeuvre seems to answer to always the same, self-imposed rules. In that sense it demonstrates a determined autonomy (auto = self; nomos = law)

## Poetics

In the 1990s Velter made paintings using elements from scientific drawing: graphs, formulas, wiring, and screws. He was in search of pure form. In his own words:

*“I considered an authentic approach to be important because as a visual artist I felt a moral duty to research elementary components such as form, colour, matter, proportion and harmony myself.” With this construction he ended up with the reality of the “Ding (an sich)” which, according to Kant a.o., ultimately remains “ein Unbekanntes” (“an Unknown”). Lacan calls this reality sometimes the impossible, sometimes the unimaginably female (sex).*

With a series of works under the title *Fremdkörper* (*Foreign Bodies*, 1999-2011) he tried to make bonelike forms. I quote Yves Velter somewhat more comprehensively here:

*“I tried to make as archaic a form as possible with as little means as possible. I took a lump of clay and started to knead it with my hands”.*

In a certain sense Velter came up against an impossibility this way. As a symbolic alternative or a sort of ‘next best thing’ he ended up with a sausage-like form of which he made different (sometimes chromed) versions in manganese steel so it would be more durable. In order to open this steel form he placed a little flap on it. A lot of the paintings or sculptures from this period, incidentally, have an open part or a hinge. Symbolically referring to calm. The origin of this was an incident which Velter experienced as a child when his father allowed him to open up an old television set, out of curiosity, to check if there were little people in the device. This incident resulted not in an understanding (of how the device worked, in this case), but in the finding of a calmness with regard to the question, an important lesson of life for later on.

Maybe we are allowed to link all this to Jacques Lacan, for whom the pot, the vase or the urn is the preeminent artistic primordial form. For it encases the void of the unimaginably real. By extension concave forms, better than convex ones, constitute a first-rate ‘container’ for what psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion calls “beta-elements”. By this he means fragments of the real which can be ‘bound’ – by what he calls “reverie” or “alfa-function”, with the help of the big Other/muse – to symbolic (the conventional symbol) and imaginary (icon and index, see philosopher and semiotic Charles Sander Peirce) forms.

An in my opinion poetical work from the early period is the painting *Himmelfahrt* from 1992. It is a tube with angular bends; as a result you can see some light only near the end. It makes one think of a human life, as well as of the creative process: a tunnel where you inevitably end up in. At first narrow and flat, with little space, little breath. At the end an opening through which new reality penetrates. An idea that is ripening, an opening that comes into being, a new form, a new language. The composition is precise, seems well thought through. Every detail counts. This work is layered and loaded. Something is stirring. It is a work that “*hands over a master key for one’s own door*” (Joannes Késenne), that “*sets out on a journey to the inside*” (René De Bok): the start of an oeuvre that is not cheerful nor spectacular,

but that “slides uneasiness into the brain of the spectator, by showing what we all feel, but do not want to know” (Mark Ruyters).

With works like this Velter, as it were, put a treble clef in front of his stave, that from then on set the tone. The result is a mysterious oeuvre that leaves the enigma intact or even tries to magnify it – following the example of the alchemists. There is something like making the everyday unknown, a self-evidence that is being pierced through. It is being really attentive, going deeper than the surface, letting oneself be touched and commoved by the strange. It is inauspiciously coming home with people who ultimately remain in their own world. Solipsistically.

Velter’s human figures are like floating creatures or monads who never really reach each other, who glide past one another like searchlights in the darkness, in a world of walls, enclaves, dead-end streets, built-in cupboards. A world like one big *cul-de-sac*. A world of strongboxes and hermits, of “speaking vacancy” (Frederik Van Laere).

## God is dead

By Velter’s own account the previously mentioned exhibition *Serendipity* was a turning point where he abandoned the research into images and forms as such and actually started to focus completely on the human being. Over the last few years this has resulted in paintings that resemble building plans, where people are being watched by means of satellite images as it were, while they are vainly trying to penetrate through to themselves and to each other.

It is the human condition as God sees it. That is not an *interventionist God* though, whom we no longer believe in, just like Nick Cave in his song *Into my Arms*. It is a dead or liquidated God. Not a God who withdraws in order to lovingly make place for the human being (as described in *La pesanteur et la grâce (Gravity and Grace)* by Simone Weil, but a God who has beaten a retreat. Who has left us to our own devices, while we are searching and groping about in the darkness in spite of all kinds of attempts at being enlightened.

The death of God is movingly described in a passage from *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft (The Gay Science or The Joyful Wisdom)* by Nietzsche. On a bright morning a madman on a market square lights a lantern with the words:

*“I seek God, I seek God”.*

The other people mock him. Maybe God is hiding or lost like a child? In response to this the insane man says:

*“Where is God gone? I mean to tell you! We have killed him – you and I! We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us?”*

(English translation: Thomas Common, The Macmillan Company, 1924)

Quoting William James:

*“An irremediable flatness is coming over the world”.*

Velter’s human figure is often solidified in a senseless action, a clumsy position, he is looking for an equilibrium, appears cumbersome, groping about, existentially lost. Over the past few years all kinds of contents have been freeing up. What can he make of them? They elude us. We try to give them a sense and a meaning.

Velter's work has become fully philosophical, epistemological, ontological and anthropological. There is no communication, no contact, no relation. What predominates, is nothing more than juxtaposition: our nearest one is just someone who stands next to us. In the meantime our individuality threatens to disappear in *das Man* (*the They* – Martin Heidegger). In a witticism of Awee Prins, we go from *Dasein* to design. The situation is critical.

## Enlightenment

The past few years Yves Velter has more and more been concerned with vain illumination and impenetrable darkness, an incessant searching and groping about for memories, traces, ourselves and each other. This theme is being pictured in *De lichtzoekster* (*The light-seeking woman*) (2013), the different variations of *Where the Forgotten Is Stored* (from 2013 on), *Truthseekers* (2014), *Ontdonkering* (*Un-darkening*) (2014), etc. A lot of paintings start to refer to a forgotten past by means of old photos, an afterimage of which echoes through or which end up as photoprints on canvas, like in *Signal-studie* (*Signal Study*) or *Settlers' Signals* (2015, see p. 53). We are all connected to each other in time and space. With a chain of about seven reciprocal contacts one often covers the whole world or entire humanity.

Sometimes Yves Velter registers the moments between memory and forgetting or *Het moment tussen feit en fictie* (*The Moment between Fact and Fiction* – 2014, see p. 233). In *Closed Souls* (2015, see p. 215) a woman is on the move. She is carrying a chain of keys. History as well as the future consists of a series of encounters with people to whom you can scarcely get through. At other times he tries to picture emotions or thoughts by means of a sort of simulacra in works such as *Besefverlies* (*Loss of Consciousness*, see p. 180) or *Geheugenclusters* (*Memory Clusters*) (2016, see p. 182). In *Example of Translation* (2016, see p. 55) the human figure is reduced to a fragmented conglomerate of words and thoughts. In *Predicting the Past* (2016, see p. 14) it is all about feeling under the surface and watching what wells up. Here and there a classic bust appears (e.g. *Beïnvloeiing* (*Inflowing/Influence*) (2016), see p. 21) by which Velter creates a variation on the same theme in a third dimension.

In a number of recent paintings you often see the ground plan of an imaginary building from a drone perspective. The building resists outsiders who want to look in, but also on the inside there are only failed encounters. His paintings actually abound with a postmodern version of Diogenes of Sinope, who – so is understood – was looking for a human being, with his lantern in bright daylight. According to Michel Foucault for example, not only God is dead but man too has died. After Max Weber, today not only the world but also the internal world are divested of their magic. Exhausted by nervousness the soul seems to have disappeared from our existence. In that sense Yves Velter is full of Nietzschean *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (*Untimely Meditations* or *Unfashionable Observations*). He explores and images psychic and spiritual dimensions such as doubt, memory, silence, the way of seeing, hesitation, encounter, influence, sentiment or prediction. Walking through his oeuvre is like wandering through a landscape of ghosts: elusive, astonishing and fascinating. He makes us look with a different eye. Also at ourselves.

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