

Letter to Enrique Marty, Philippe Van Cauteren

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In 1970 – a year after you were born – Werner Herzog made the film *Auch Zwerge haben klein angefangen* [Even Dwarfs Started Small]. The film is a metaphor of human existence. With extremely aesthetic images it evokes a vision in which social themes, emotions and mechanisms are brought to light in an open and raw way. The apocalypse of the human soul is enacted by dwarfs. All performers are indeed Lilliputians, and it is they who convey the movie's cruelty and articulated psychology to the spectator. Whenever I'm confronted with your work, this film immediately comes to my mind. In both cases, radicality and seduction are set in an artwork, and the turbulence of the images makes the viewer fall silent. Most encounters with your work – as with Herzog's movie – were unpleasant. What I mean by this, is that the dialog with your sculptures, paintings, drawings or video works has seldom ceased to haunt me. The pieces have forced me to take a stance towards the vocabulary of everyday life, towards art and human ambivalence. It suggests itself to relate your works to Otto Dix, for example, who also created an acute and insistent style of painting possessing poetical-sociological relevance. Yet your works deeply infect our perception with black thoughts and figures. The direct painting immediately casts the viewer into a modulated variant of reality. For all the themes are drawn from your direct surroundings and reappear 'raped' as panel paintings. Your relatives and friends – both private and in art – are victims of a crime in which the distortion of reality contributes to portraying the complexity of man. And therefore one's self (the self-portrait) is also the object of a radical artistic act. In the group of sculptures, *Fanatics*, one sees an assembly of small figures dressed in camouflage outfits. Each of the sculptures bears your face, but with different expressions. The title of the work already indicates that it is about the transformation of the individual into a compliant, hysterical being that obeys higher forces. The tradition and the introspection of the self-portrait are translated into a committed artwork that combines sculpture and painting, merges mass and individual, and in which the figures' skin becomes the scene of the crime of a direct style of painting. It is an apocalyptic piece that in a visionary and 'abstract' manner reproduces that which in today's world can result from fanaticism. As the artist, you are the mastermind of current and historical iconography, indexing the smaller and greater tragedies of our society. Each picture, each body is distorted, inflated and left behind as a 'misused' cadaver. In your works, the scenario of reality is reshaped to the unprecedented terror, horror and restlessness of everyday life. Each stroke of the brush embodies the unbearable tension of abject beauty. It is the entire range of perceptions, the internal mechanisms of social hierarchy, that you thrust onto the viewer in an endless avalanche. Otto Dix is not the only possible point of reference. Both the tradition of Spanish painting (from Velázquez, to Ribera, all the way to Goya) and the cultural occurrence of cruelty equally offer themselves as reference horizon. You evoke the contours of the pits of our soul, an unconscious gloomy conglomeration in which private and public images are blended together to the insanity of polite conventions. Your pictures reveal a charged restlessness which will once and for all do away with indifference in the world. Art is a crime and the artist is the indecisive judge of our society.

Philippe Van Cauteren
Gera, October 15, 2010