

In a quiet residential street, about a 15-minute walk from Tilburg central station, Just Quist's studio is located in a former classroom of a small elementary school. A teacher answers the door, and when I tell him whom I'm there to visit, he vaguely points the way while trying to control his students running to the playground outside. It appears to be 'somewhere in the back' so I pass through the lobby that houses some wooden furniture and books, walk through the folding door and end up in a hallway that leads to a small gymnasium. I feel like the big, friendly giant in these miniature surroundings and I can't help but wonder if this unusual environment affects the artist and his work; Schools are often places of memory, but not necessarily of reflection. When I knock on the door, I'm once again reminded of Quist's impressive stature. He offers me tea that he prepares in his tiny studio kitchen where the sink hits his tall frame on knee level, and we start talking.

Rene Joffe, what will be the show's title, comes to the surface quite literally in several moments throughout the selected pieces. The initials are turned into a work themselves or intervene other existing pieces. I catch myself wondering about their symbolic meaning when I realize they might just 'merely' be a random assortment of letters that automatically manoeuvre your mind into thinking this has to have a reference. Some works are lying on the floor, others hang on the wall. There are monochrome geometric paintings, either in a rectangular or diamond shape of which some are plain steel and others are brightly colored and textured.

There's the eye catching grid Rene Joffe (2014) composed of expanded passivated steel that has the gradual color effect of a rainbow, and geometric shapes cut out from rough building material in a most unexpected periwinkle (ZT, 2013). In case of the latter, the cut-outs seemingly pull the piece partly into the wall while it simultaneously implies the outlines of a non-existing frame. The austerity is skillful and cunning though I feel I'm slowly but surely falling into the trap of Quist's geometric simplicity. This artist is a trickster; letting his work ostensibly speak a formal, direct language which is sometimes piercingly abstract, yet sparking wonder in small and unanticipated twists. What could be stern is softened with lightness, humor even. There's another grid with a centralized silhouette of Snoopy (ZT, 2013) and a grid with its corners covered with triangle pieces of cardboard (ZT, 2013). In case of the former, Snoopy is exemplary of a figural representation that deteriorated in its symbolic significance, turning it from meaningful and relevant to a 'classic'. This transitive approach to imagery demonstrates Quist's clever way of dealing with the unavoidable transformation of symbolism and representation. Furthermore, Snoopy feels particularly fitting in this school setting; he is known to speak solely in thought clouds rather than actual spoken words, just as an adolescent's way of going through the world where dreaming, rather than verbalizing, overpowers.

The latter provides a similar subtle tenuity where the piece could have easily folded into the autonomous minimalistic game, were it not for the addition of the cardboard. Instead, the artist's gesture puts this potential monumental quality into perspective, sobering up his artistic language and consequently an overthinking viewer.

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