

ARTIST AS CURATOR

This summer you can visit a remarkable exhibition at Galerie Tatjana Pieters. For the third time already, the Ghent-based gallerist brought together an artist and a collector's couple to present a unique collection of works.

After two previous successful exhibitions based on the same concept, the Ghent gallery of Tatjana Pieters is again organising a special cross-pollination between an artist and a collector, from 18 June to 28 August 2021. This time it is Hans Vandekerckhove who was allowed to explore the collection of Paul Declercq and his wife Marie-Rose Benoot. 'It was a journey of discovery through twenty years of collecting, gathered in the home of the couple in Roeselare. Many works are still wrapped up but the intention is to give everything a place in the spacious house with annex,' explains the artist. The exhibition at Tatjana Pieters' gallery also gives us the opportunity to admire more than a few art gems. In addition to older and several new works by this Belgian painter, visitors will also be treated to works by other striking names such as Roger Raveel, Panamarenko, Rinus Van de Velde and Bendt Eykermans.

Imagicasa spoke with the three key figures who made this exhibition possible, and was thus completely immersed in the world of art.



Hans Vandekerckhove, *The Marsh Experience* (2016), oil on canvas, 142 x 190 cm, unique
Courtesy of the artist & Tatjana Pieters

INTUITION AND TRUST

‘My Russian mother and Belgian father were two intellectuals with a broad interest in culture. They brought me along to exhibitions from an early age, so I developed an extensive fascination for art,’ Tatjana Pieters tells us. She first followed a course to become an art restorer and then went on to study art history at the University of Ghent. Through a student job in a gallery, where she quickly got a lot of responsibility, Tatjana got the taste for it and to be able to really work along her own vision, she soon started a business under her own name. She explains that the decision to work with certain artists is an intuitive process, ‘based on a clear connection between

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Hans Vandekerckhove, *The Mountain and the Rainbow* (2002), oil on canvas, 100 x 125 cm, unique
Courtesy of the artist & Tatjana Pieters

head and heart. If you select artists for purely pragmatic reasons, your heart is not in it enough to put the work out into the world with love. On the other hand, if you select something purely on the basis of the heart without looking at whether and how you can market it and whether you are the right gallery owner to represent the work, you cannot achieve the necessary financial goals to continue supporting the artist and the gallery.’ It’s a job that requires persistence and hard work and will often only pay off after a few years. ‘Those first years were not easy commercially. Fortunately, I gained the trust of a small group of people. Philippe Van Cauteren bought a work for the S.M.A.K. collection back in 2006. I was able to continue working on my commission for four months and my first museum sale was a fact. The trust of collectors started to grow, and so did my relationship with them. Because in the story of the gallery, of course, the collector cannot be left out,’ says the gallerist. This is how the interest in the story of the collector began and the fascination with the triangular relationship



Rik Van Loth, *Thirst* (2000), oil on canvas, 95 x 77 cm
Collection Paul & Marie-Rose Declercq Benoot, courtesy of KETELER Gallery

between artist, collector and gallerist, each of whom acts as a curator in a special exhibition series. ‘For this, I ask an artist from the gallery to select works with me from the collection, in which they are also represented, of an art lover and to bring them into an exhibition in dialogue with the collector. This is often with new saleable works by the artist in question,’ explains the gallerist. Two previous exhibitions according to this concept already put the collections of Tanguy and Bieke Van Quickenborne (selected by Anneke Eussen) and of Anny De Decker, founder of Wide White Space (selected by Derek Sullivan) in the spotlight. Now Tatjana Pieters, together with painter Hans Vandekerckhove, went treasure hunting in the collection of the couple Paul Declercq and Marie-Rose Benoot.

EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT

During a search for a second home in France, Paul Declercq and his wife ended up in the idyllic Gargilesse-Dampierre, where the well-known Post-Impressionist painter Paul Madeline had lived and worked for a long time. ‘Through the local lady of the castle, we bought some works by Madeline. Back in Belgium, we missed having a direct link with the artist, but our interest in art was definitely aroused,’ Paul Declercq tells us. Not much later, a first important addition to their collection was a work by Hans Vandekerckhove: ‘That purchase and meeting have influenced our view on art. In order to avoid stress in the decision-making process, we then decided to concentrate on mainly collecting living and contemporary Belgian artists.’



Hans Vandekerckhove, *From here to Eternity* (2002), oil on canvas, 190 x 142 cm
Collection Paul & Marie-Rose Declercq Benoot



Anne Marie Launay, *Concord* (2000), ceramics,
37 x 18 x 25 cm, collection Paul & Marie-Rose Declercq Benoot
Courtesy of Anne Marie Launay ceramics Belgium, photo © pieterclays

They now have a good knowledge of the art market and explain to us that art does not always have to be expensive or only accessible to the happy few. ‘Our advice to starting collectors: develop your personal taste pattern, go by your instincts, define a collecting concept, and above all, see art not as a financial, but as an emotional investment. Living amongst art makes you happy!’ says Paul Declercq. Now he and Marie-Rose are fine-tuning and expanding their collection almost every day. ‘Through Instagram, culture attachments to newspapers, magazines, galleries, contact with other collectors, open days at schools, etc., we are constantly looking for new Belgian talent.’ In addition to contemporary painting, in recent years, variation has entered their collection through additions such as ceramics and installations. ‘Subdued depth and colourful zest for life are the driving forces behind our collection,’ we also hear. And you can now discover those themes for yourself at Tatjana Pieters, to whom Paul and Marie-Rose have loaned some 25 works for the current exhibition in her gallery. Among others, we see here a soothing black-and-white landscape by Rinus Van de Velde and the playful triptych *The flying cigar, the flying tiger* by Panamarenko.



Hans Vandekerckhove, *The Glasshouses of Canigou* (2016), oil on canvas 150 x 120 cm, unique
Courtesy of the artist & Tatjana Pieters

ARTIST'S CHOICE

Under the title *Private Collection Selected by #3 / Hans Vandekerckhove*, you can visit the exhibition this summer which is the result of a special cross-pollination between gallerist, collector and artist. 'I see it as a solo exhibition that is fed by Paul and Marie-Rose's collection. It will be an exhibition in which a few concepts are central: coagulation versus fluidity, alienation versus engagement, cloudiness versus transparency, nature experience versus intimacy, reality versus displacement,' explains Hans Vandekerckhove. He, too, played a key role in the realisation of this exhibition and is excited about the recognition of his work at this time in his career. Gallerist Tatjana Pieters explains the choice to work with him as follows: 'He occupies an exceptional position in Belgian painting. Hans has a loyal group of followers and is known in collector's circles thanks to his

museum exhibition career, but the broader importance of his position as a painter has not yet been sufficiently recognised, I think. It is therefore interesting to be able to show his work in combination with a whole generation of young painters who are now creating a furore, but have been at it for a much shorter period of time.'

In response to this, Hans tells us: 'It is fascinating to see how young artists in this chaotic era, where styles and movements are absent and everything flows, still find their own form of expression, develop their own visual language and are able to put their finger on the pulse of current events. They have become a guiding and driving force in our society that we can no longer do without.'

'YOUNG ARTISTS ARE A DRIVING FORCE IN OUR SOCIETY'

I also find it remarkable to discover that with my own visual language I feel a connection with the new generation of young artists. I worked in the desert for years and remember that a curator at Art Brussels made a narrow-minded remark about the theme of romanticising nature in my work, while I now see a young Ben Sledsens who is successful with this. This feeling is a strong source of inspiration to continue working with enthusiasm, as I have been doing.'

The artist is therefore very grateful for the support he receives from collectors and galleries. 'From a young age, I have always wanted to work with professional galleries. I like to retreat to my studio to focus on my work, I need peace and freedom to work on my oeuvre. That is why I prefer to leave the presentation to those who have professional knowledge of the art market, but also know how to archive and interpret my work, preserve it and, last but not least, provide financial support,' he explains.

Hans Vandekerckhove also created several new works for the *Private Collection Selected by #3* exhibition. He mentions among others the series of paintings called *The Mountain and the Rainbow* (2021), which is a thematic visualisation of the collector duo Declercq-Benoot. 'The mountain is a place of solidified energy, where in the silence of thought, you hear the possible answers. Seeing a rainbow in the sky is something wonderfully paradoxical, where you need both sun and rain to see the boundless colour spectrum,' says the artist.

For him, the exhibition also reflects the essence of this so-called corona age: 'The search for the sublime and the marvellous, each in our small locked world,' he concludes.

We are delighted to have the opportunity to take a look at Paul Declercq and Marie-Rose Benoot's collection and to be surprised once again by some unique art gems. The exhibition runs until 28 August 2021 at Galerie Tatjana Pieters in Ghent. 🌸 (Text: Eline De Mont)



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