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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

REZI VAN LANKVELD

THE APPROACH

For the longest time, following the example of a writer I considered nearly infallible, I thought the adjective that defined the quality inherent in clouds, rocks, and so on that permits us to see various things in them—perhaps most notoriously the face of Christ—was “magmatic,” and that this word got at the shifting quality of their anthropomorphism. It’d be a fair descriptor of Rezi van Lankveld’s paintings, too, had I not just looked “magmatic” up and found that, oops, it pertains exclusively to the actions of magma. Even so, at a stretch into geological metaphor it fits the Dutch painter’s work, whose polymorphous allusiveness arises from the solidifying of semichaotic liquid events.

Van Lankveld paints flat on panel, pushing her diluted oils around wet-on-wet without an advance idea of what the eventual form will be—so explains catalogue essayist Zlatko Wurzburg, anyway. The process strongly affects one’s reception of the images, which shuffle hesitantly forth out of coagulated, marbled, and wrinkled paint in closely modulated shades of gray, green, brown, and blue; but what, precisely, they depict will vary Rorschach-style from viewer to viewer. *Spread* clearly pictures a coupling couple, but I wouldn’t put money on my interpretation of *Don’t Stop* as two babushkas doing the cancan, and a good 70 percent of *Treasure* (all three works from 2004) remains opaque to me—the girl in an old-fashioned dress I *can* recognize, but the remainder could be anything from a recumbent corpse to a leashed pack of dogs. This region of diminished significance is where materiality grabs the baton, in ravishingly felicitous passages of pure painting: There are areas of inky blue marbling in the voids of *Treasure* which are like tiny, scale-collapsing, nebulae-filled universes, although one reads them first as technical effects. Such bipolar efforts are nothing if not a high five to the practiced viewer’s capability to slip gears between figuration and flat-out abstraction, consequently feeling the gentle click of a well-maintained mechanism.

So, one has plenty of room to roam around; to access unstable worlds by squinting. The darker side of that privilege is established by the mood of many of the paintings, which, conveyed both by sour palette and by iconographic allusion, is opiated, spiked with menace, and signals a downside to the gift of imagination. If the imagery of Goya and, less impressively, Victorian fairy painters like John Anster Fitzgerald looms large in the relatively transparent *Ideas of Solution*, 2005, with its discernible trio of menacing sprites scampering around the head of a recumbent but open-eyed figure, it manifests a malevo-

once fiercely believed have now become part of a motley fairground ride for the eye, is what injects a contemporary tenor into such works. A painterly come-on draws one inquisitively into *Second Nature*, 2004, a clump of doomed figures at the bottom of the sea (or something entirely different, but almost certainly nothing too jolly), but that entry point is also a potential exit: The fact that, with the air of a child consoling itself after a nightmare, one can say, “It’s not real, it’s only a painting”—and indeed the slow-burning subtleties of tone and texture in van Lankveld’s magmatic fields encourage one to do so—is what allows one to walk away, not only unscarred but also entertained.

—Martin Herbert



Rezi van Lankveld, *Give and Take Twist and Kill*, 2005, oil and pigment on board, 56 7/8 x 59 1/2".