

PHILIPPE VANDENBERG

Kamikaze

14.4.-16.6.2019

The Kunsthaus Pasquart is showing the most comprehensive exhibition to date of the work of the Flemish artist Philippe Vandenberg (1952-2009, BE), in collaboration with the Hamburger Kunsthalle, where the exhibition was presented from 16.11.2018 to 24.2.2019. It is the first institutional exhibition of his work in both Switzerland and Germany. Highly acclaimed in his home country of Belgium as one of the most important artists of the last few decades, Vandenberg produced a radical and uncompromising oeuvre that is just now achieving greater international acclaim. The extensive retrospective comprises some 70 paintings and 80 drawings and prints from the period 1995 to 2009. Many of the works on loan come from the artist's estate and are now being presented to the public for the first time.

Vandenberg's art displays a compelling intensity that has the power to both disturb and excite. The exhibition title *Kamikaze* refers to a central artistic principle he espoused. *Kamikaze* meant for him creative destruction, i.e., enabling some-thing new to arise by annihilating what went before. This principle is reflected in myriad ways in Philippe Vandenberg's paintings and drawings: in the many stylistic breaks, in his overpainting of existing pictures and scraping off paint once applied, and also in *Kamikaze* as a written word or its enigmatic abbreviation as «K.A.» or «K.A.M.», as well as in many motifs and recurring symbols that open up the field of tension between destruction and creation or starting anew. The latter include for example burning monks (self-immolation as a form of political protest) and the element of the swastika, an ancient sun symbol that, when tilted ninety degrees, becomes an emblem of destruction. Vandenberg's art is rife with themes from contemporary world events, from literature and art history, myths and legends. What distinguishes these works is nonetheless his devotion to the extreme contradictions to which human beings are subject: the simultaneity of love and hate, beauty and ugliness, innocence and guilt. The Japanese word *kamikaze* (divine wind) is used to refer to a Japanese air raid technique in the Second World War and also as a description of self-defeating actions. For Vandenberg, applying the *kamikaze* principle meant a radical change in direction and most of all a vehement demand for agile thought processes and an open mindset: «[...] to destroy your own thinking is equally important. You have to be mobile. Remain absolutely mobile!»

During his lifetime Philippe Vandenberg was celebrated in particular for his expressive, figurative canvases and rhythmical abstract works that coincided with the widespread renewal of painting in the early 1980s. The exhibition concentrates on the second half of Vandenberg's career – on the period from 1995 to 2009 – in which the artist moved back and forth between figuration and abstraction, while developing a number of themes and working methods. The drawings selected for the exhibition prove him to be an extremely prolific and talented draughtsman. Whereas painting was necessarily a grander statement, drawing for Vandenberg had a mystical, almost religious quality. Vandenberg drew from the mid-nineties, primarily using pencil, ink, gouache and watercolour. Most of his drawings from this period are more than preliminary studies and can be considered as autonomous images. It was above all through drawing that Vandenberg found solace from his inner turbulence. The hundreds of books that he filled

with drawings almost on a daily basis from the mid-nineties show above all special motifs and forms that he explored in repetitive variations.

The exhibition is a collaboration with the Hamburger Kunsthalle.

Exhibition curators

Brigitte Kölle, Head of Collection Contemporary Art Hamburger Kunsthalle, and Felicity Lunn, Director Kunsthaus Pasquart.

Publication accompanying the exhibition

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated publication (DT/ FR / ENG), edited by Brigitte Kölle and Felicity Lunn, with texts by Harald Falckenberg, Josephine Karg, Brigitte Kölle, Felicity Lunn, Johannes Muselaers and Marek Wieczorek. Approx. 100 illustrations, 272 pages, hardcover. Uitgeverij Kannibaal editions, Belgium, 2018.

Guided tours

Thurs 9.5.2019, 6pm (dt)

Natacha Isoz, art historian

Thurs 6.6.2019, 6pm (fr)

Felicity Lunn, director Kunsthaus Pasquart

Talk on the work

Sun 14.4.2019, 2pm (fr / eng)

The artist's son, Mo Vandenberghe and Johannes Muselaers, archivist and researcher at the Estate Philippe Vandenberg, in conversation with Felicity Lunn.

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