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“Rezi van Lankveld: Figures in the Abstract” at Friedrich Petzel Gallery

By: Simmy Swinder



*Rezi van Lankveld, Spirit. Courtesy of the artist and Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York.
Photograph by Colby Bird.*

Friedrich Petzel Gallery, a modest space, was perfectly suited for the second New York solo exhibition of Amsterdam-based artist Rezi van Lankveld. The exhibition only contained nine paintings of varying sizes, however, each work is powerful enough to stand on its own. Upon first glance, the thickly layered oil on canvases seems to be of the Abstract Expressionist style: forceful, energetic, and spontaneous. But Van Lankveld goes beyond the post-war style by organically painting her canvas to look like objects found in nature, in particular marble rock. Through a careful balance between calculated painting and free-flowing movement, the artist subtly inserts all kinds of objects throughout her paintings, such as human facial features, animals such as a penguin, bear, and swan, and landscape silhouettes. The inconspicuous figuration begs the viewer to look closer and longer to find the hidden figure, much like a less dizzying version of the Magic Eye book series.



Rezi van Lankveld: Figures in the Abstract, Installation View, via Friedrich Petzel

The nine paintings at Friedrich Petzel Gallery beg the question of how much of the brushwork is deliberate and conscious and how much is spontaneous and of the subconscious? The experience of finding figuration in the abstract is akin to finding faces in nature—in trees, rocks, and clouds. The artist executes these effects with great skill and purposeful care. The exhibition is certainly worth a visit, as many art historical influences, such as the phantoms of Francisco Goya's paintings and Surrealist notions of the subconscious seeping into the conscious mind are present. Van Lankveld is often compared to her contemporary, Cecily Brown but her restricted color palette, limited use of the canvas, and more concealed figures make her paintings works of their own merit.

Van Lankveld uses fluid movement and a limited palette—two to three subdued hues of blue and grey—giving the works a potentially chilling effect. Yet the large brushstrokes, layered paint, in some places use of the impasto technique draw the viewer closer. Moreover, the selection of the colors in conjunction with the painting style emit the impression of the ephemeral, quiet and eerie but nonetheless pleasant. In addition, the compositions are centered and well balanced.

Rezi van Lankveld: Figures in the Abstract runs through March 13th
537 West 22nd Street

Take the C or E train to 23rd Street and/or to the M23bus to 23rd Street and 11th Avenue
Gallery Hours: Tue-Sat, 10-6
Gallery Website: www.petzel.com