

# Perstekst,

*Steven Baelen–Manor Grunewald–Vadim Vosters, NOSBAUM & REDING, LUXEMBOURG LU*

Group show

[20.11.08 – 10.01.09]

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Steven Baelen [b. Roeselare, 1981, lives and works in Ghent] fills sketchbooks with densely packed drawings [or “notes” as the artist prefers to call them] of his direct surroundings. In these he explores and records everything he perceives. The “notes” breathe a homely, even intimate atmosphere. What strikes us, is the flat character of the images – a consequence of Baelen’s analytical way of looking at things. Everything the artist sees, he records on the sheet of paper, without hierarchy, with only the composition in mind. This results in flat images, the notes becoming as it were a “skin” on which the artist focuses when he commences a painting. Though at first sight the sketches look true to nature, the “notes” do not correspond with reality. We could therefore rightly refer to them as false images.

Often Baelen’s “notes” acquire the character of installation drawings, which conquer space like a virus. Lending meaning to spaces is a particular feature of this still young oeuvre. In these spaces, which bear the traces of a previous life, the artist reconstructs his own familiar surroundings with charcoal. A tension results between the drawn elements and those already present in the surroundings. The space charges itself. Baelen has made a name for himself mainly with these monumental wall drawings.

Sometimes the narrative [and analytical] “notes” are the basis for paintings or drawings that tend to be more synthetical. Not the subject as such, but painting itself is central in these works. For Baelen, painting is defining, i.e. it involves coming to a [visual] conclusion. The artist himself puts it like this: “Everything I need for a painting is comprised in the ‘note’, i.e. the drawing is not a tool to reinvent reality [like Bonnard did]. On the contrary: I ‘use’ my notes literally, as if they were photographs that tell me how to paint.

As such the narrative element of the note becomes irrelevant. That is also why I leave copies of my notes lying about in my studio, where they become smudged and damaged. In short: I leave things to chance, till a certain image starts to take shape that I can use for a painting or a drawing. Precisely because of this way of thinking I consider myself a fundamental painter

[Patrick Ronse]