

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

BRUSSELS

Sophie Kuijken

26 June — 2 August 2014

Rue Charles Decoster 8 - Brussels 1050



Sophie Kuijken, A.P.K., 2014, Oil and acrylic on panel, 69 5/8 x 48 in.

Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Brussels is delighted to be collaborating with artist Sophie Kuijken, showcasing her paintings for the first time. This Belgian artist, who was born in Bruges in 1965 and graduated from the Gent Academy (K.A.S.K.) in 1988, has followed an unconventional career path, and her works are equally atypical. After graduating, she spent almost 20 years in introspection and isolation, ceaselessly painting portraits, a genre which was to remain her leitmotiv and the favoured medium for her pictorial experiments.

Nothing remains of those years of searching during which Sophie Kuijken deliberately cut herself off from the world and the art market. She has destroyed everything. This gesture – which was radical, to say the least – marked the beginning of a new phase, this time turned outwards. In 2010, the doors of Sophie Kuijken's workshop swung open for the first time. They were unlocked by a major Belgian collector, who, unsettled by the body of work that he discovered, decided to share his reaction with Joost Declercq. In 2011, the director of the Dhondt-Dhaenens Museum in Deurle, Belgium, decided to put Sophie Kuijken's paintings on display for the first time in a solo show, giving the public its first chance to experience her portraits of men or women with that very particular aura.

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The strangeness radiated by Sophie Kuijken's portraits comes from the actual method used by the artist, who composes her models from images selected on the internet. She conducts her on-line searches using key words: a name, a place, a number. This yields a gallery of individuals whose anonymity she cultivates by blending them together. The effigies resulting from this random mixing process no longer have anything in common with their original models. This makes the painted portraits a kind of 'visual recycling', far removed from any formal reality, despite the impression of verism that they convey.

Sophie Kuijken's upbringing in a family of classical musicians makes the notion of verism resonate all the more in her work. While this Italian artistic movement from the late 19th century strove to transpose French naturalism (Balzac, Zola, Maupassant) and its study of society and human psychology, both in music and in painting, Sophie Kuijken is intent on transposing her own vision of the human condition in her paintings.



Sophie Kuijken, *N.R.*, 2014, Oil and acrylic on panel, 29 1/8 × 23 7/8 in.

Her works become her own experimental novel. It is as if, by dint of introspective retrenchments, Sophie Kuijken is handing us the very essence of Being (its passions, its doubts, its intellectual questioning, its follies, its drama and its comedy) through her portraits of such disconcerting oddness.

The transposition of the digital images to the wooden medium involves the lengthy, patient juxtaposition of coats of oil and acrylic paints. The layering of the materials, and the application of glazes covered by a varnish, generate deliberate morphological distortions like those used by the mannerist painters of the Renaissance, a practice extended into the 19th century by Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780-1867), who added some extra vertebrae to his famous *Odalisque*, thereby enhancing the elegance of the anatomically rigorous line.

Sophie Kuijken's pictorial approach is not

too dissimilar to that of the French master in the sense that she, in her turn, concentrates on the pure visual experience ahead of any other sculptural imperative. The neutral background of her portraits, their tight framing, usually from the waist up, and the powerful chiaroscuro which models and animates her figures, may also be seen as a personal evocation of the art of Caravaggio.

Her portraits can take several months to design, with Sophie Kuijken repeating the same gestures until she achieves a form of 'mental abstraction' which she likens to the 'purity of a sound', a musical metaphor which is hardly surprising given that her family is made up of internationally renowned musicians. Her reinvented portraits are inhabited by a magnetic presence given an exalted quality by the unfathomably profound expressions of the characters she depicts. When their huge dark eyes meet ours, they strike an immediate chord with our hearts and minds.

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Sophie Kujiken, *G.K.A.M.*, 2014, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 42 1/2 × 90 1/2 in.

Sophie Kujiken was born in Bruges in 1965 and lives and works in Willebringen, near Louvain, in Belgium.

In 2011, the Dhondt-Dhaenens Museum in Deurle, Belgium, introduced her to the public with her first one-woman show (catalogue).

In 2012 in Antwerp and in 2013 in Knokke, the Geukens & De Vil gallery staged her first 2 solo shows.

In 2013, Sophie Kujiken participated in the 'XXH' group show at the Dr. Guislain Museum in Gent (Belgium).

In 2014, the Fondation Francès, in Senlis (France), invited Sophie Kujiken to its 'Vestige' group show (until 30 August 2014).

In March 2015, the Cultural Centre in Maasmechelen (province of Limburg, Belgium) will host her second solo show. A catalogue will be published on that occasion.

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Still life
22 April - 21 June

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Opening 26 June

Enoc Perez
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Opening 10 September

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6 November - 27 December 2014
Opening 6 November

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Cloître Saint-Merri

Laure Prouvost
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Opening 18 September

Luc Delahaye
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Bourg-Tibourg

Xu Zhen by Madeln Company
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Mickalene Thomas
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Opening 11 September

Guillaume Bresson
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Opening 5 November