

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUXELLES

SOPHIE KUIJKEN

January 7th - March 11th, 2017

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri - 75004 - Paris



Sophie Kuijken, R.A.H., Oil and acrylics on MDF board. 130 x 180 x 3,5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia Paris/Bruxelles

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is delighted to present the first exhibition of Sophie Kuijken in Paris after two exhibitions held in Brussels in 2014 and 2016.

Born in Bruges (Belgium) in 1965, Sophie Kuijken has worked for 20 years in the most complete privacy. She chose to destroy a large part of her creations from these years of research, until finally, in 2011, she accepted the invitation of Joost Declercq, director of the Museum Dhont-Dhaenens (Belgium), to showcase her work for the first time.

At first glance, Sophie Kuijken paints portraits. However, her pictures are everything but random. Her paintings exude a strange mystery. The artist composes her works with images she collects from Internet. Using key words (such as a term, a number or a place), she picks photographs of people that inspire her. She then mixes and patches up fragments of faces and symbols from these iconographic explorations in order to give life to new individuals. *"I really love painting people. I like reading their mind by simply looking at them and totally seeing through their life. However, it is very intimate and personal, so I don't do it with strangers, neither with friends or acquaintances. Instead, I make up those experiences"*, says the artist about her work.

In multiplying identities, she creates unique individuals that she later transposes in her work. Through this visual recycling, Sophie Kuijken brings strong presences into being, by which the portrait is reimagined and recreated.

Sophie Kuijken engages in a time-consuming technical process inherited from the Flemish art tradition. The artist adds layers of glazing on top of layers of oil and acrylic paint. These stratum of paint contributes to emphasizing intentional body distortions. Painted on MDF boards (made of wood fibers and synthetic resin assembled under pressure), some of her artworks can take up to several months. This long layering process is not only about technical mastery; it is a purposeful approach. To her, *"this method is like repeating a word a hundred times until it completely loses its meaning and becomes abstract, like a pure sound, yet deep, moving and substantial."*

The new pieces presented in this exhibition bring a whole gallery of individuals to life. The framing varies to zoom in on a face or have bodies float on a dark and undetermined background. The ambiguity of these images goes with a great attention paid to details through the fold of an item of clothing, the choice of a certain color or the mastery of the play of lights and shadows. The darkness of backgrounds, the frontal points of view and the formats chosen reveal the essential photographic dimension in Sophie Kuijken's work. Some details confuse us while giving us enigmatic clues: fishes next to a body lying horizontally in her piece entitled *V.S.N*; a spade dropped on a shirt pocket in *S.B*; a braid rolled up around a neck in *T.M.O*; a piece of clothing hiding the legs of a subject in *S.L.Z*.

These reinvented people who do not refer to any definite type seem to stare at us and weigh us up as much as they seem to hide from us. The intensity of their gazes both disconcerts and fascinates us. Alone or in duo, these characters appear present and absent at the same time. Through combining distinct identities in time and space on the same surface, Sophie Kuijken blends, mixes up and confronts various feelings and expressions within the same face. Between fiction and reality, the artist proposes a real visual experience that disturbs and overwhelms us due to the part of unsaid and implicit things behind it. These imagined people also question our relationship to others.

Sophie Kuijken is born in Bruges (Belgium) in 1965. She currently lives and works in Willebringen, near Leuven (Belgium).

She graduated from the Academy of Ghent (K.A.S.K), Belgium, in 1988.

Since 2011, she enjoyed major solo shows such as *Picture this* at the Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens of Deurle (Belgium, 2011), but also at the Galerie Nathalie Obadia of Brussels (Belgium, 2014), at the Cultural Center of Maasmechelen (Belgium, 2015), a solo show at Art Brussels in the booth of the gallery (Belgium, 2015), and another exhibition at the Galerie Nathalie Obadia of Brussels (Belgium, 2016)

Sophie Kuijken also took part in notable group shows including *Dries van Noten – Inspirations* at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs of Paris (France, 2014), *Vestige* at the Fondation Francès in Senlis (France, 2014), at the Belgian House of Köln (Germany, 2014), and *Le portrait bourgeois* at the Museum of Ixelles in Brussels (Belgium, 2016).

Sophie Kuijken's work is represented in many international private and public collections.

The first monographic book dedicated to the artist's work will be published in March 2017.

Galerie Nathalie Obadia
Paris
Bourg-Tibourg

Galerie Nathalie Obadia
Paris
Cloître Saint-Merri

Galerie Nathalie Obadia
Bruxelles

Ricardo Brey
All that is could be otherwise
January 7th – February 25th, 2017

Sophie Kuijken
January 7th - March 11th, 2017

Brook Andrew
February 2nd- April 1st, 2017

Shahpour Pouyan
January 7th – May 6th 2017

Group show
March 18th - May 13th, 2017

Brenna Youngblood
April 21st - May 20th, 2017

Jean Dubuffet et Fabrice Hyber
May 19th - July 13th, 2017

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