

# rodolphe janssen

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## **Thomas Lerooy**

### ***If you feel more than butterflies in your stomach***

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*If you feel more than butterflies in your stomach* marks the fourth show by Thomas Lerooy at rodolphe janssen since the start of their collaboration in 2007.

The title of the exhibition refers to the inscription on the vomit bags Lerooy found on the last flight he took before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. *If you feel more than butterflies in your stomach*: butterflies versus vomiting, being in love and at the same time getting nauseous from the fear of losing oneself or of being rejected. The title focuses on an inherent duality that is omnipresent in the artist's work: it attracts and repels at the same time, it is recognizable yet alienating, it is humorous and serious, intimate as well as grotesque.

In the last 15 years, Lerooy has made a name for himself with his sculptures and drawings. This show focuses solely on paintings, a recent development in his oeuvre that came out of a necessity. Lerooy stumbled upon the limits of his maniacal drawing technique and the constraints gravity imposes when working in bronze. He started painting over his works on paper more and more. For Lerooy, painting is the greatest good, the pinnacle of art history; it allows him to give shape to emotions he didn't dare to touch upon before. Where paper took up a lot of space as a matter in itself, the canvas in his paintings becomes almost invisible. They are standalone frames that offer a view on a non-existent reality.

Whether Lerooy draws, sculpts or paints, he is always searching for the limits of his medium or his subject. His enigmatic works challenge the logic of the viewer and leaves the interpretation to their imagination. He uses recognizable motifs that he manipulates and thus undermines. The sea, a recurring theme throughout various works in the exhibition, becomes an active participant instead of a passive backdrop. The sea plays, frames, conceals and reveals. It emerges like a curtain behind which lies another layer of meaning.

That same layer appears in all the works throughout the exhibition. The banana peels in *So appealing*, or the crab legs in *Oh crab*, make it unclear what the foreground and background is, what the subject or direct object is, and where the meaning lies. The paint roller in *Exit* literally disguises a part of the painting and leaves the viewer guessing what is going on behind it. Like Baldassari, Lerooy hides just that part where, perhaps, the action takes place.

Lerooy investigates and breaks through the codes of painting, which manifests itself in a tension between abstraction and figuration, sharpness and haze, structure and smoothness. They are light-hearted and charged at the same time, and thus put themselves and the reality from which they arise into perspective.

## **About the artists :**

Thomas Lerooy (born 1981 in Roeselare, works in Brussels, Belgium).

His work has been the subject of several institutional solo exhibitions in recent years, including *Behind the Curtain* at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium (2019); *Vanity Fair* at Gaasbeek Castle, Gaasbeek, Belgium (2018); *Playground* in Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium (2017); and *Beauty in the shadow of the stars* at the Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France (2015).

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Lerooy's work is included in public institutions such as the Musée National d'Art Moderne - Center Pompidou, Paris, France; Province of West Flanders, Belgium; Belfius Art Collection, Brussels, Belgium, City of Brussels, Belgium, City of Puurs and City of Knokke, Belgium.