

KETELEER GALLERY is very pleased to present *A Short Trip*, the second solo exhibition by Floris Van Look (°1990. Wilrijk, BE) with the gallery. The exhibition consists of an entirely new series of oil paintings.

With *A Short Trip*, Floris Van Look (°1990. Wilrijk, BE) – following his previous exhibition, which was populated with gnomes and anthropomorphized trees, fruit and church towers – introduces his newest character: a living, though melting, ice cube. An at first sight playful cartoon quickly stirs up a stream of associations, recognition and existential issues.

Floris' surprising choice to use ice cubes is the result of those spontaneously generated musings that precede the creation of every work of art: what do I actually have to say? And thus, inevitably: who am I and what do I identify myself with? In light of today's tumult around this topic, Floris eventually ended up with the idea of a sort of man without qualities, after that famous book by Robert Musil, but then his own, light-hearted interpretation of it. Floris has a great love for literature and critical thinkers (prior to his art education he already a diploma in clinical psychology) but believes it's also important to relativise all lofty ideas/related loftiness by using humour to come down to earth and look at the small things in awe. He likes to simplify things therefore, often to an almost childlike fantasy. For his new oil paintings, Floris took complex sociological themes such as (social) identity and the search for meaning and distilled them into a simplified yet striking symbolic figure: man as a transparent, empty block of ice, lacking a face or any other distinguishing features.

When we look at the paintings, we're immediately confronted with a conflict: the ice cubes are on a trip, going on a merry little adventure to feed and inspire the soul, enjoying the comforting warmth of a campfire... but are clearly melting in the process! The ice cube is ephemeral. It seeks to experience and take in the world as it slowly but steadily dissolves. The presence of a few drops of water turns the innocent cartoon into an image full of tension, an everyday holiday snapshot into a disturbing scenario, and immediately confront us with the paradox of human life: how in every moment we're simultaneously living and dying, making memories and losing time.

Is the ice cube naive, blind to the dangers? Or is it knowingly persisting with its explorations of new horizons despite its fragile state? Are our efforts futile or courageous? Is this a critique of illusionary preoccupations and ambitions; of chasing things that lead nowhere? Or an ode to man's small but grand dreams, to his love for the world? The work can be interpreted both flippantly cynical as comfortingly recognisable. Floris leaves it to the viewer to fill in the blanks. For him it is first and foremost a critique against hubris, but also, and closely related to this, an ode to nature.

Floris' paintings offer a mildly-relativistic answer to philosophical the questions surrounding the issues of free will and self-determination: the conviction that is mainly your environment that shapes who you are and that you shouldn't be too concerned with the search for and showcasing of your 'highly unique' personal characteristics (which Musil's lead character considers a major cause of alienation). the ice cubes are surrounded by meticulously detailed landscapes and even though they're placed in the centre of the image (as they are in their own lives) as the lead characters, they're actually only visible, only given substance, because of the nature that surrounds them and literally gives them colour – they're 'merely' the product and the reflection of their environment.

The ice cubes are shown in different situations, exploring the world. They're looking for something outside of their comfort zone, something to ignite their fantasy so they can return home afterwards feeling renewed, able to look at the old with a fresh pair of eyes. Our view determines our reality after all and sometimes it needs new input. When people feel the need to go and find themselves, they actually go out looking for something to take in, to absorb and make their own. They face the unknown, willing to lose a bit of themselves, hoping to receive something new in return. Though preferably not too far out of their comfort zone... An all-in holiday for example, a precalculated safe little adventure for which most risks are eliminated from the get-go, with just the right amount of novel experiences to quench the thirsty soul.

The work *The Flood* takes a bit of a side road; it shows how nature reclaims the infrastructures shaping our everyday lives, how the foundations we take for granted and literally and figuratively build our whole lives on, are only feasible in a climate which permits this. Or perhaps this is a trip that did go horribly wrong?

As mentioned before, Floris doesn't want to convey any fixed message. He's more humble than that. He makes a suggestion, an observation, and subsequently releases the work out into the world. His paintings too, he strongly believes, aren't shaped only by himself. Through the imaginations of different people in different times, the works start to lead their own life, with new meanings – and that's just the way he likes it. In this sense, the melting ice cube also hints at the instability of every art work, how it is co-defined by critics, fashion and zeitgeists which all repeatedly redefine the work from ever-changing vantage points.

Floris' paintings portray numerous paradoxes, typical of life, which are whimsically emphasized by his ice cubes. Just as we can look right through the ice cubes, Floris offers a clear insight into our human condition. This time he portrayed man as an ice cube, as a fragile and transient 'looking box' on to the world which – despite it all – faces its limited future with hope, embracing the absurdities of life to make the most of it. With the symbolic title *A Short Trip*, which refers not only to the journeys the ice cubes undertake but also to that short trip that is every individual's life, Floris invites you – and, as always, with that wink we know from his entire oeuvre – to take a short trip to the woods, to discover his latest works and then return home, hopefully with a satiated soul and a newfound smile.

Lauren Wiggers, 2022.