

## NEL AERTS

### The Village Idiot

22<sup>nd</sup> June – 29<sup>th</sup> July 2017

Nel Aerts' newest body of work derives from a residency she attended in 2015 at the Van Gogh house in Zundert, the Netherlands. After finding herself "quite alone" for three months, she produced dozens of self-portraits, many of which show her eating at a cafe, drinking at the bar, hiking in the mountains, or wandering around town by herself. Aerts has since developed a selection of these drawings into paintings and textiles on canvas, imbuing them with humour and a richness of colour and line. Round, cherry-red curtains, jelly raindrops, pastel walls and an abundance of small, inviting clouds tempt us to imagine what varieties of fantasy the artist is able to achieve in her time alone.

At just over two metres high, many paintings included in this exhibition are the largest Aerts has made to date. In one, she shows herself reclining like an odalisque on a wooden bed, suggestive of the kind of furniture seen in a film by Jean Cocteau; at any moment, the bed's long headboard could become the crest of a wave. Her hands regularly transform into waxy candelabras, and, when staring out to sea – a common motif in her work – the back of her head resembles an umbrella. Aerts continues to dream while sitting alone at the pool, or dining at a restaurant. But, in places that favor sociability, such an escape can turn into poignant melancholy. When the veil of fantasy drops, the stark (but comical) realisation of her loneliness remains.

The title of the exhibition, 'The Village Idiot', refers in part to someone who is both deeply aware of her own inner life as well as how she might be perceived from the outside. Aerts' face is often shown in three-quarter turn, as if surprised to find a viewer suddenly staring when only moments before she was hiding in her own thoughts. This is a familiar pose for women in European painting, as in Matisse's 'Nude Standing Before an Open Door' (1936). But Aerts' figures, rendered in loose, loopy lines, remind us that sudden exposure can, in reality, feel quite awkward. In 'The Pink Studio', titled after Matisse's painting of the same name, Aerts shows herself surrounded by previously finished works, little 'selves' that converse with her in tones both loving and mocking. Moving toward greater self-understanding, Aerts accomplishes an open and vigorous experimentation. We are always invited into this domain, whether to convalesce in her solitude, laugh at our own, or simply to enjoy the complex world she is creating.

Nel Aerts (b. 1987) studied at Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent (KASK) from 2005-2009. She lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium. Forthcoming museum exhibitions include Museum M, Leuven (2018) and Warande, Turnhout (2017). Recent solo exhibitions include Horizont Gallery, Budapest (2016); Vincent van GoghHuis Galerie, Zundert; KIOSK, Ghent (2015); Castillo/Corrales, Paris (2014); Galleri Specta, Copenhagen (2014); Frankendael Foundation, Amsterdam (2013) and Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2013). Group shows include Barbara Gladstone, Brussels (2017), De Bond, Brugge (2017); MuHKA, Antwerp (2016); Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (2014); Kunsthall Kade, Amersfoort (2014); Junior Projects, New York (2014); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2013); Be-Part, Waregem (2013); WIELS, Brussels, (2012); Kunstraum, London (2012); De Garage, Mechelen (2011) and S.M.A.K., Ghent (2009). This is her second exhibition at the gallery.

The exhibition will be open from Tuesday – Friday 11 – 6 pm and Saturday 12 – 6 pm, otherwise by appointment. For images and further information please contact the gallery on 020 7684 8890, or email [info@carlfreedman.com](mailto:info@carlfreedman.com)