

Walter Swennen

Un Cœur Pur

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Press Release

Xavier Hufkens is delighted to present an exhibition of recent work by Belgian artist Walter Swennen (b. 1946).

In his fourth exhibition with the gallery, Swennen continues his playful and experiential journey into the world of language and meaning, appropriation, colour, texture and form. Moving between abstraction and representation, and occasionally executed on found supports, the works explore both the poetic and material aspects of painting.

Swennen takes seemingly random elements—logos, lettering, found images, words and phrases—and transforms them into visually arresting works that tread new ground in terms of composition, colour and technique. As erudite as they are humorous, they often deserve a second look: things are never quite what they seem. Swennen's approach to painting is intuitive, spontaneous and influenced by his surroundings and everyday life (such as books, art, landscapes and people) as well as by chance encounters and coincidences. His sharp intellect and incisive wit accounts for his light-hearted and lyrical way of looking at the world. When he paints, nothing is premeditated. Nor is he constrained by any one style, technique or approach. While the catalyst for a painting might be a word or letter, for example, it is Swennen's engagement with his medium that ultimately determines the finished work. He literally 'coaxes' his paintings into being, and often over a long period of time. It is akin to a form of improvisation: an unpredictable process of push-and-pull that paradoxically implies both control and risk, not to mention a command of materials (paint in all its viscous, liquid, opaque, transparent, glossy or matte variants), techniques (adding, subtracting, superimposing, tracing and erasing) and tools (brushes, painter's knives, rags and aerosols). The resulting works, which often combine intriguing textures and unexpected colour combinations, tend to defy easy categorization. The terms 'landscape', 'portrait' and 'still life' barely apply; the works are not abstract, but nor do they depict reality.

Swennen's works are typically devoid of a single perspectival point or compositional framework, such as foreground and background. Nor do they contain any immediately obvious narratives or contexts. Letters, fragments and statements in English, Flemish, French and other languages often infiltrate his canvases: phrases that might either lend significance, form linguistic riddles or possess a double meaning. Free from external anchoring points, the works are self-contained and enigmatic. Yet the more one looks, the more one realises that the act of painting itself—in a physical and material sense—is as important (if not more so) than the objects, images or words themselves. As a result, we invariably start to scrutinise how the works were made: a line of enquiry that speaks volumes about the boundless possibilities of painting.

Walter Swennen was born in 1946 in Brussels, where he lives and works. His work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including *La pittura farà da sé*, La Triennale di Milano, Milan, Italy (2018); *Ein perfektes Alibi*, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany (2015); *Continuer*, Culturgest, Lisbon, Portugal (2013) and *So Far So Good*, WIELS,

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Brussels, Belgium (2013). Swennen has also been included in notable group exhibitions, such as: *The Absent Museum*, WIELS, Brussels (2017); *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age*, Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2015-2016); *Atopolis, Manège de Sury*, Mons (2015); *The Importance of Being...*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana (2015); *La Belgique Visionnaire/Visionair België*, curated by Harald Szeemann, Palais des Beaux-Arts/Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Brussels (2005) and *Trouble Spot. Painting*, MuHKA, Antwerp (1999).

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