

Thomas Raat
Sanseveria
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Juliette Jongma

He asks me if I like black coffee because there is no milk. I always drink black coffee, I say, so no problem there. Once he hands me the Winnie the Pooh cup steaming with black liquid, I'm tempted to sit down on one of the beautiful chairs displayed throughout the room, all fairly classic modernist designs, and all redone in red and blue or turquoise. At first glance, Thomas Raat's workspace looks like a design studio. It's fairly small but has big windows and a lot of light. Updated modernist furniture pieces are presented on low pedestals. They are pieces I'd love to have in my house, for everyday use. Raat starts talking in a fast pace, feverishly throwing ideas at me and the more I listen and look around, sipping black coffee, the more I realize I'm engulfed in an intimate bounded relationship between what these works evoke in my personal and art historical memory and the residue they carry of another artwork at this moment in time.

We talk about modernism, memory, art history, forgery, intimacy, theatre and convention. Raat tells me that first and foremost he loves the modernist aesthetic. In my mind he might even be seduced by it. His rich use of colour pulls me in: turquoise, deep reds, and a saturated pink that carries so much depth in its exuberance that it's hard to pinpoint if it's pink, raspberry, red or burgundy. He uses it on two pedestals that display a bench like construction. Because of the luminosity of the colour it seems to defy gravity, dripping up into the wood of the object and colouring it in a deep, violet purple. The pedestal is therefore no longer a pedestal but just as much part of the work as the design displayed on it. The unit placed on a thick wooden board, with two similar boards standing on their side behind it and held together by magnets that create a corner. The entire ensemble looks like an intimate scene waiting for its protagonists to enter stage left and 'activate' the objects. However, this would belittle the beauty of the scene itself: the painterly quality it carries in the colours, the intimate stillness portrayed by a little curved vase dangerously placed on the outer edge on one of the boards. It is about that delicate moment when the visual language of modernism turns into convention.

Raat operates with between the binary oppositions of presence and absence in his devious play of interlocking

art historical moments. On the walls are four white paintings with a black pattern consisting of square and rectangular shapes (part of which is based on Malevich's work) that add to the level of domesticity. All four paintings show similar yet diverse motifs, that, it turns out, are all made up of the same pattern but mirrored and flipped up side down. Raat chose to add yellow balls to decorate them further. Just because he can. His work is both present, a supplementary to an original, yet also absent in what it refers to in (art) history. The so-called original however, through the residue left on the surface, maintains its attachment with this time. It dissolves the polarized relationships between external and internal, between form and content. The materiality of the pieces simultaneously suggests the processes of solidity of materials, historicity and memory, a phenomenological experience of the world, and at the same time a negation of all these.

Judith Vrancken