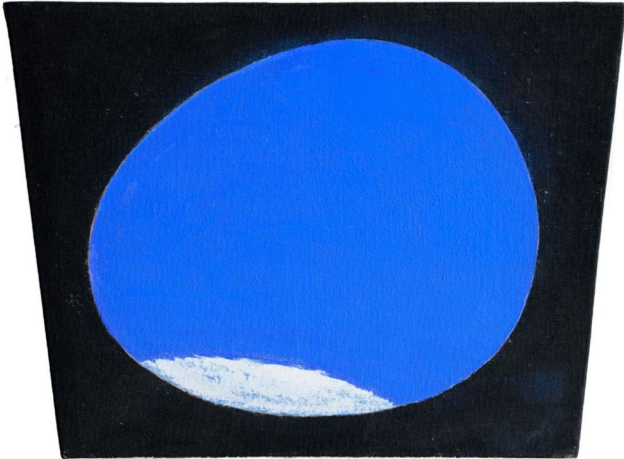


JCJ Vanderheyden: *Reflections*

31 May – 26 August 2023



Untitled (Airscape), 1992, acrylic on canvas mounted on wood, 27 x 36 cm.

TMH is pleased to present one of the most important Dutch artists, JCJ Vanderheyden (1928–2012). This is the first survey show of Vanderheyden in Amsterdam since his retrospective at the Stedelijk Museum in 2001. The show focuses on his famous checkerboards in black and white and in brilliant colors, paintings of airplane windows, reflections on art history, and signature horizons, worked out on canvas or with photography. The distinguished art writer and curator Rudi Fuchs praised Vanderheyden's radical gestures: "He could paint, but what if he photographed that painting: [...] was it another painting when he painted upon the photograph of the painting?" (Stedelijk Museum catalogue, 2001)

Vanderheyden used to say that he would wait for "creative moments that can be very tiny, so that they pass and return" and that these moments could become a "heavy impulse" to make work in relation to the outside world as it happens. Most of the works in the show at TMH are from a group of small paintings, which use a black background and masterful brushstrokes to amplify the effect of color. The choice of colors (with stunning patches of blue, Vanderheyden's trademark) make these works delicate and elusive; their abstract shapes, on the other hand, draw attention to something momentous. The impression of vastness produced by the modestly-scaled painted grids and horizons are a direct outcome of Vanderheyden's explicit position that the space of art cannot help but be part of the technological space. What would the role of painting be in this situation, he seems to have asked?

In his reflections on Vermeer, Vanderheyden offered an invaluable insight in response to this question: "Vermeer's neurons seem to be linked, by way of the visual cortex, to our own eyes: a physical reproduction." He underscores the role of painting—as opposed to other media—to make visual connections across time. In Vermeer's paintings, we see the room that Vermeer saw (and the social world around it) better than we would in a straight photograph. And yet both the technology of photography and of painting are deployed: Vermeer used the inventions of the 17th century, such as a range of lenses for the camera obscura, to first register the image, but the crucial moment was the use of luminous paints to bring the projection in line with his vision.

In his inkjet print *Vermeer's Milk* (1994), made almost thirty years ago and now on view at TMH, Vanderheyden amplified a detail of the *Milk Maid* (1660) to highlight the abstract qualities and dispersion of color underpinning Vermeer's objects and the mystery of their iconographies. The artist's mental image is at the heart of the work and is meant to be shared. It is remarkably prescient that Vanderheyden's works came to express a view of painting—Vermeer's masterpiece *View of Delft* (1656–60) remains a touchstone for him—that links art history to now. He found that the sensuous qualities of color (acrylic or digital in his case) could frontline painting as one of the most relevant forms of the spatial organization of knowledge.

Vanderheyden's view of painting is further advanced in his books, which were published and exhibited as self-contained works. Both functional and unconventional, they draw attention to what he referred to as the "natural clarity" of expression and to how he responded to the then prevailing practices, such as art photography and appropriation. Already in the early 1990s, for example, he seemed to have analogized the flow of information on monitor screens to cosmic radiation: images pass through and remain blank, like white noise, until one's mind captures them and makes them original, individual, and meaningful.

While interrogating the crossovers of science, society, and art in different mediums such as video, photography, digital sound, and installations, Vanderheyden would take up and abandon painting—creating, by way of these periodic reversals and moments of surrender to new mediums, some of the most radically post-minimal, post-painterly works. It is as though what mattered most was not to confront the world's overextended infrastructures, but to invite us to contribute our own knowledge, to prompt us to enter into the technological flux in order to understand its direction and impact on life (and art).

—Marsha Plotnitsky

About the Artist

JCJ Vanderheyden (1928–2012) is regarded as one of the most influential Dutch contemporary artists. His reputation as a painter who redefined painting while engaging with multimedia and science was already established in the late 1970s. Since his participation in *documenta 7*, 1982, in Kassel, Germany, Vanderheyden continued to be invited for solo and curated exhibitions in museums and galleries. He had surveys and retrospectives in major museums in the Netherlands, such as the Kunstmuseum Den Haag (Haags Gemeentemuseum at the time), 1967 and 1977, Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, 1983, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, 1990 and 2011, and Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 2001. Throughout his career, Vanderheyden played an important role in the Dutch art community, and his artworks and books continue to be highly regarded. Until his death in 2012, Vanderheyden lived and worked in his native city of Den Bosch, NL.

The show is organized in collaboration with gallerist and art historian Fred Wagemans.