



BART KONING

2020

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Galerie Peter Tedden



## MEMENTO VIVERE

### SILENCE

A while ago I came across a remarkable short film in black and white. It consists of a strip of photo negatives moving from left to right. The first negatives show undulating lines, as in a graph, and towards the end of the film the waves change into straight horizontal lines. Under the strip of negatives, numbers indicate the time in hours, minutes and seconds: 10.58.56, 10.58.57, 10.58.58 and so on till 11.01.03. Each indication of time is accompanied by an arrow that points to the graph above.

At the beginning of the clip a text above the negatives reads: 'One minute before the hour. All guns firing'. A minute later, at the end, there is a text saying 'One minute after the hour. All guns silent.' The film is accompanied by a soundtrack of heavy artillery fire that abruptly stops at 11.01.00. The sound of the artillery reverberates for a while and then it becomes quiet. Suddenly the thin twittering of birds is audible, underlining the sudden, peaceful silence.

The clip marks the end of World War I as witnessed on the American front near the Moselle river. It conveys the absurdity of war in a stunning auditive way. For years, soldiers on the front line did everything possible to eradicate their opponents, but once politicians and generals decided the war was over, the clatter of arms stopped immediately. On November 11<sup>th</sup> of 1918, the killing was allowed until eleven o'clock A.M. sharp – after that, no more gunfire, no more poison gas, no more fighter planes buzzing overhead, no more screams of soldiers. Silence. A silence in which all the atrocities, all the horrors, all the noise that preceded it are condensed.

However real the clip seems, in the meantime, I have learned it is not. The clip is a reconstruction, made for the Imperial War Museum in London and based on the only surviving evidence of what happened at that moment in history: a sound graph that is visible on the negatives, generated by six microphones placed around the battlefield to record artillery shots in order to locate enemy armaments.

## BALANCE

You may wonder what this reconstructed fragment of the Great War has to do with the serene paintings of Bart Koning. Surely, the lives of most of us today can't be compared to the dire circumstances of the soldiers in the trenches. But that's not the point. The point is the incredible, soothing power of silence. Bart Koning grasps that power.

Looking at his paintings, the sudden silence that hits you is similar to the one in the film clip. The thundering cacophony of voices, noises, faces, and images of our contemporary lives all of a sudden falls silent when we come face to face with the delicate still lives of Bart Koning. Berries, pears, grapes, apples, onions, a sparrow, and even a rhinoceros are just *there*, in the center of the composition, vulnerable and still. Paradoxically, the quietude of these still lives is deeper and more intense this way than if Koning had left his canvases completely white. The fruit, vegetables, and occasional animals are crucial in underlining the silence – similarly to how the chirping birds in the film clip emphasize the surrounding silence rather than disturb it. Koning's silence has the feel of an exclamation mark.

How Bart Koning presents his objects is deliberate and essential. Bluntly, sometimes absurdly so, they occupy the center of his compositions, but almost always in a delicate, uncertain balance that symbolizes the fragility of their existence. For how long will that cherry stay in place with its stem proudly sticking up? Won't that bowl full of apples soon tip over and crash on the floor, disturbing the peace and quiet?

In the hands of Bart Koning these objects act like equilibrists: holding our breath we watch them in awe, in the way we might watch the antics of tightrope walkers high above our heads. The precarious balance reminds us how vulnerable the soothing silence is, it can be broken in a split-second. It places the vulnerability of our own existence in the center of attention. Instead of looking at still lives we are looking at ourselves.

## LIVE

These paintings show the tremendous skills of a master painter. But Koning is not interested in artistic or artisanal boastfulness. Technique and skills are means to an end for him and not a goal in themselves. In this he distinguishes himself from many contemporary realists whose works often don't surpass a skillful yet empty melancholic yearning for centuries past. The realism in the paintings of Bart Koning is conceptual – it addresses something that lies beyond mere depiction.

While it might seem natural to make a comparison between Koning's still lives and those of the Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century master Adriaen Coorte, famed for his bundle of asparagus on a marble slab, there are major differences, the main one being context. Most still lives in the 17<sup>th</sup> century were meant as a Memento Mori, a morality piece reminding its viewers of the inevitability of death. Over the course of centuries, that meaning moved to the background and still lives became signs of the painterly skills of their makers and the affluence of their owners.

Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems utterly useless to painstakingly reproduce still lives on canvas or, in the case of Bart Koning, on MDF. Why would you, with all these photographic means available? It would be a valid question, were it not that Koning doesn't simply reproduce. By rendering his objects in full size and juxtaposing the difference between a strawberry and a rhinoceros, he forces their natural existence on us. By painting and thus immortalizing them, Koning forces our attention to things that are all around us, but that we ignore or altogether fail to see.

Armed with electronic devices, we tend to forget that we are still natural beings, that we are part of nature. The food we buy in supermarkets, wrapped in plastic and similar in size and color, is objectified to such a degree that it doesn't seem to stem from nature anymore. By giving fruit, vegetables and animals his painterly attention, Bart Koning presents to us their innate, inalienable and intrinsic power.

We are nature and we live off of nature – going through birth, life and death. During this journey, art can offer silence, contemplation and a sense of equilibrium. Basically, instead of Memento Mori, this is what Bart Koning's works tell us: Memento Vivere, remember to live.

IJsbrand van Veelen, November 2020, Amsterdam

















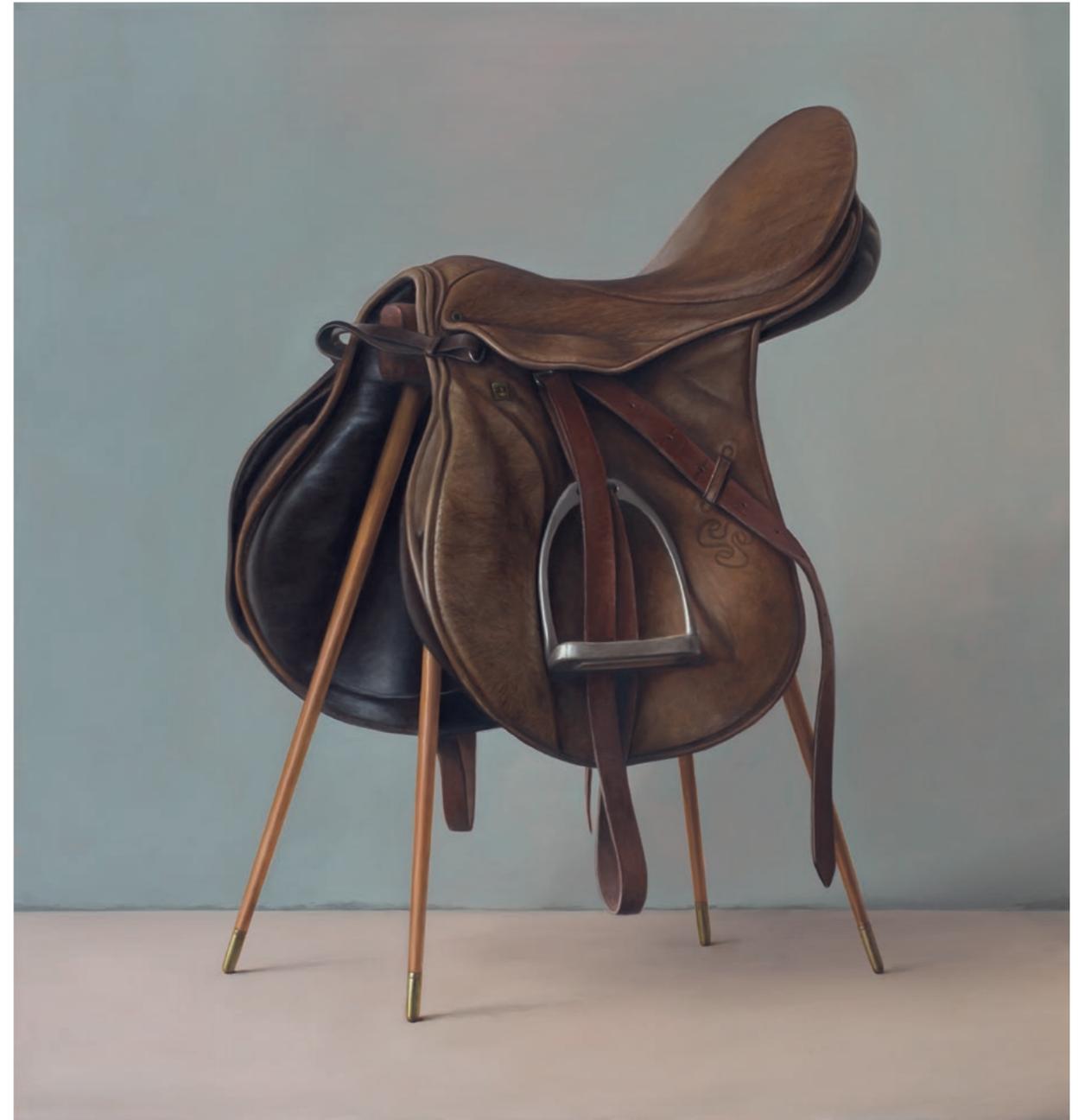


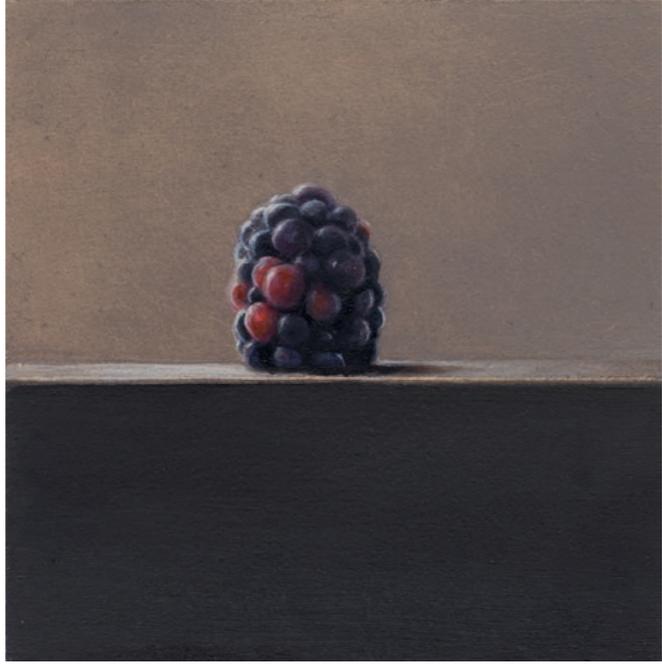






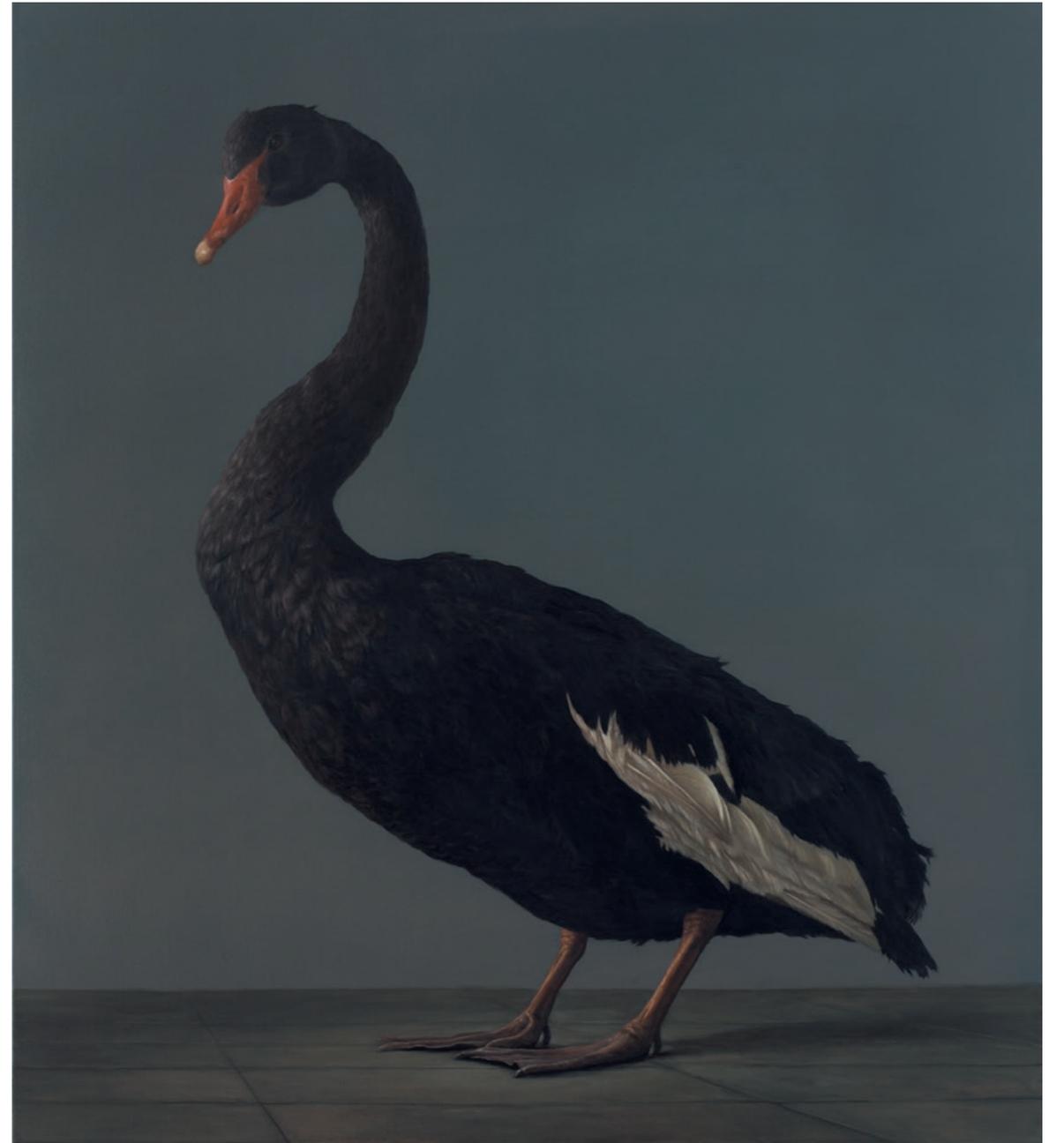
















## Abbildungen

- 2 Kirsche 2020 8,7 x 8,7 cm Öl auf MDF
- 7 Drei Birnen 2020 24 x 30,5 cm Öl auf MDF
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- 17 Rote Johannisbeeren 2020 29,5 x 31 cm Öl auf MDF
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- 26 Spatz 2020 29,5 x 31 cm Öl auf MDF
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- 43 Hummer 2019 50 x 69 cm Öl auf MDF (Privatbesitz)
- 44 Pfauenauge 2020 8,7 x 8,7 cm Öl auf MDF

## Bart Koning

1957 geboren in Amsterdam  
1977–1979 Academie Artibus, Utrecht  
1979–1982 Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam  
1992 Umzug nach Krefeld, Deutschland

### Ausstellungen (Auswahl)

2006 *Stilleben*, Städtische Galerie Viersen (K)  
2007 *Jubiläumsausstellung*, Verein Kunst und Krefeld, Krefeld (E)  
2009 *Große Dujardin*, Dujardin, Krefeld (K)  
2011 *Große Kunstausstellung NRW*, Museum  
2014 Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf (K)  
2013 *Going Home*, Krefelder Kunstverein (E / K)  
2014 *Ross ohne Reiter*, Kunstmuseum Solingen (K)  
2014 *Aus den Ateliers*, Krefelder Kunstverein  
2015 *The Box*, München (E)  
2016 *Taxi*, Kunstverein Schopfheim (E / K)  
2017 *Große Kunstausstellung NRW*, Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf (K)  
2017 *Homo Ludens*, Galerie Karsten Weigmann, Düsseldorf (E)  
2018 *Ohne Titel*, WG Kunst, Amsterdam  
2019 *Neue Stilleben*, Galerie Karsten Weigmann / Galerie Peter Tedden, Düsseldorf (E / K)

2019 *Große Kunstausstellung NRW*, Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf (K)  
2019 *Lang Leve Rembrandt*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam  
2019 *Rheinblick*, Kunstverein Xanten (K)  
2019 *Neue Gemälde*, Galerie Meerbusch (E)  
2019 *Jahresgaben*, Krefelder Kunstverein  
2020 *Realisme*, Galerie Bonnard, Nuenen, NL

(E) = Einzelausstellung  
(K) = Katalog

### Veröffentlichungen

»Stilleben«, Städtische Galerie Viersen, Katalog  
»Große Dujardin« Dujardin, Krefeld, Katalog  
»Große Kunstausstellung NRW«, Kataloge  
»Ein niederländischer Meister«, Paul Ingendaay, Blog F.A.Z., Sanchos Esel  
»Going Home«, Krefelder Kunstverein, Katalog  
»Ross ohne Reiter«, Kunstmuseum Solingen, Katalog  
»Taxi«, Kunstverein Schopfheim, Katalog  
»Neue Stilleben«, Galerie Karsten Weigmann / Galerie Peter Tedden, Katalog



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Galerie Peter Tedden  
Mutter-Ey-Straße 5  
40213 Düsseldorf

Tel. +49 177 671 74 67  
info@galerie-tedden.de  
www.galerie-tedden.de

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IJsbrand van Veelen

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Christian Konrad (S. 30/31)  
Bart Koning

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