

AGENDA

Uit in Brussel • Vos sorties à Bruxelles • Out and about in Brussels

Walter Swennen: a thousand bombs and shells!

17/04/14, 09.54 | SAM STEVERLYNCK



(© Walter Swennen)

Walter Swennen, who had a fine retrospective in Wiels a few months ago, is back – and with a bang! Not only is he at a leading international gallery this time – Xavier Hufkens – but he has an impressive series of recent paintings on display. The works span the years from 2010 to 2014, with the addition

of a few older canvases that he has reworked. For example, he has taken a child's drawing of a spider, by his grandson, and done two different things with it: in one work, he reproduces the spider in oils on canvas, against a uniform red background, with a band of blue above it; in the other, he paints the same image on iron on a smaller scale. In the background you can see a grid structure that he has painted over. In both cases, the results are impressive; they make the point yet again that for Swennen it is not about the subject matter, but about the execution. Painting itself is his subject. In another work, he revisits a drawing he did when he was seven. On the right, you see a drawing of Mickey Mouse; beside it is the picture he made at the time, following instructions. Comic strips are often a source of inspiration. A submarine, for example, is depicted in the way that the Flemish strip cartoonist Willy Vandersteen would have done it.



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But Swennen is equally interested in logos, signs, and symbols, which leads him to create a game on the theme of language as a system of signs. On one painting he has written "Flor/Fina", a reference to a brand of cigars, in such a way that language almost becomes a logo. Another work, in pastel shades, contains words that have been written upside down – so that language not only becomes illegible, mere signs, but is also a kind of subliminal profanity, as the words in question read "*débile*", "*faux cul*", and "*connard*" (a series of vulgar insults in French). Language and sign frequently reinforce each other: in one painting he uses thick layers of paint to represent different blocks, above which he has written "Shanghai", conveying an impression of a metropolitan skyline in a deliberately naive style. Swennen's caricatural style and the uninhibited way in which he

combines figuration and abstraction offer a welcome breath of fresh air in contemporary painting.

WALTER SWENNEN > 3/5, di/ma/Tu > za/sa/Sa 11 > 18.00, Xavier Hufkens, Sint-Jorisstraat 107 rue Saint-Georges, Elsene/Ixelles, 02-639.67.30, www.xavierhufkens.com