

TOUCHABLE

About the drawings/watercolors of Caren van Herwaarden, by Arno Kramer, curator



In the work of Caren van Herwaarden the human body plays a major role, and in recent years horse bodies have been added. Both have much in common. Van Herwaarden approaches them in the same way, their vitality and vulnerability she makes them tragic players in her drawings, collages and watercolors. But human beings are more tragic, because horses are not aware of their mortality, do not adhere to religion, they do not whine and complain. (free after Walt Whitman*)

In *The Laws*, Plato writes that we humans have no choice but to undergo the education of two demanding "teachers": pleasure and suffering. They are the ones who teach us in pleasant or terrible ways - but always under compulsion - to live and to survive. Because we share most of the things that make us enjoy or suffer with everyone else, pleasure and suffering strengthen the bonds that fraternize humanity. Because no two people enjoy or suffer in the same way, nor are they subjected to exactly the same enjoyment and suffering in the course of their lives, they simultaneously provide each of us with an irrepeatable "biography" of our own. And thus they give profile to the true individuality of each human being.

In her work, by the way, Caren van Herwaarden does not speak out explicitly about that suffering and pleasure. It is rather that her work evokes these thoughts, than that they are drawn too literally. Yet in the complexity of some of her works you see duality as a strong substantive element. I now designate this with Eros and death, but there is surely more to it.

In her drawings you often see constructions or amalgamations of several figures, where an accent is placed on a gesture, a hand on an arm or leg. Sometimes she does this by literally cutting out parts and adding them to the whole in a different way, with a different technique.

The complexity of the compositions means that you have to look very carefully to see how one image is related to another, but you sense in everything that something is being said about the intimacy between people and sometimes the opposite: repulsion. There is a tension between the trust in intimacy and the dislike of it. A person can be drawn in isolation, as if she or he likes to bivouac in a world of beauty of his own. Sometimes he tries in vain to make contact with others. The way in which Caren van Herwaarden depicts such a solitary figure then shows once more that this solitude is metaphorically great and that this seclusion of a group is further reinforced by embraces of torsos and figures drawn by each other. The transparency that parts of the work have makes it less heavy and more bearable. The narrative is important, but it is not a compelling, unambiguous interpretation; there is plenty of room for the viewer's own vision.

Caren van Herwaarden's use of figuration is never academic, but serves each drawing's quest for an ultimate and original image. The combination of clear lines versus water colored sections means that the drawings remain captivating even tactually. Content and technique enter into a fluid relationship.

Aggression, drama, but also tenderness and intimacy play a role in Van Herwaarden's work.

In the tangle of people and horses, in which individuality seems to be subordinate, the desire for intimacy and coherence is a driving force.

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'...I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd,
I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth...'

Walt Whitman, from Song of Myself