

## **A look inside photographer/artist Jeroen Hofman's studio**

### **THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN AERIAL PLATFORM**

'This is where I started working from a cherry picker', says the photographer, originally from Brabant, as he walks past a small body of water in Amsterdam's Westerpark. 'This is where I shot the photos of Amsterdam residents relaxing with their friends and children around that small city pond. The photos show how urbanites who live in cramped conditions use the park as their back garden.' A little further down the park, Hofman did the same for a photograph in which people leisurely gather around another small pond. Nobody seems to realise that they are being photographed. Hofman: 'I always put on an orange jacket to make it look like I work for the municipality. Then, when I'm at the top of the cherry picker, I take my time and pretty soon nobody even notices me. I work at a height where you can't hear what the people below are saying and the birds above you are just out of reach. It is a position of peace, of independence. It allows you to show something personal and at the same time show the layering in the landscape.'

On top of the platform, Hofman knows exactly what he wants: 'The finished picture is already in my mind. All I have to do is find it. Sometimes I have to come back six times to find it', says the photographer. 'For my work, I use a Phase One, a hundred-million-pixel camera with a digital back that I place on a technical camera. Out of everything I shoot, I end up editing one image with a grader which I tell exactly what I want in terms of colour, atmosphere and lighting. I always look for the point where the work becomes monumental, but is still photography.'

### **People from the landscape**

'I was born in Beek en Donk, a small town near Helmond', says the artist. 'My parents were both nurses, hardworking people. I cycled to school through the countryside and worked in the fields as an asparagus picker during the holidays. The landscape has always interested me. The Netherlands is very flat, with the ever-present horizon at the centre - the eternal line.' Jeroen's brother became a corporal in the Royal Netherlands Navy, his sister became a nurse and he himself went to art school. In 2002, he graduated from The Royal Academy of Art in The Hague and first specialised in applied work, the world of physically tough jobs, training facilities of the fire brigade and marines. 'Gradually, the terrains became more and more important and the people in them became smaller, in the same way that people disappeared into the landscapes painted by the old Dutch masters in the seventeenth century,' says Hofman. 'Ultimately this led to 'Playground', a series for which I won the Silver Camera and published a book. Semi-landscapes and semi-documentary, all shot from a cherry picker. That became the kick-off for my career. From there, I started photographing Amsterdam parks from time to time. A series emerged from that, in different

seasons, in different light and with different groups of people in it. A fox hunt in the Amsterdamse Bos for example, or a children's party in Vondelpark.'

### **Head full of images**

As a child, Jeroen often went to museums with his parents. Hofman: 'With my work, I try to document as accurately as possible what is happening now, but in the back of my mind are the the landscapes of the old masters - the light of Ruisdael, the landscapes of Philip Koninck, the cityscapes of Vermeer and the abstraction of the early work of Mondriaan. That is the library I have built up in my head.'

How is the artist influenced by photography? 'My current gallery owner Wouter van Leeuwen likes to show me books, sometimes by photographers I don't know at all, such as the Texan photographer Bryan Schutmaat and the Finn Pentti Sammallahti. It is nice to fill your head with beautiful images. With the pictures of landscapes by Michael Wolff, Edward Burtynsky, Gregory Crewdson and Andreas Gursky. Nobody understood why his 'Rhein II' was sold for six million, such an enormous sum for a photograph of an empty river landscape. I think it is too little! It was made at the end of the 1990s, when nobody dared to photograph like this. I can look at it for hours. To me it is as perfect as the golden ratio. It is right from front to back. Gursky is one of the first photographers who made composed images, although in fact the old masters did the same - inside they painted what they had seen outside. Also the work is monumental, which I like. That's why I prefer to work from an aerial platform instead of using a drone. If you take your time, you get the right light, with the right people and the sheep in the right place. You can wait for the landscape to be exactly as you had in mind.'

### **The US and Japan**

Hofman also started working outside Amsterdam. 'In Rotterdam, for instance, under the Euromast and in the Kralingse Bos, and little by little I developed my personal signature.' Hofman even took his boom platform on the ferry to go and photograph on Texel. 'There, on the islands, I discovered a new kind of landscape, which brought more peace to my work, more rhythms and forms, a salt marsh disappearing into the mist or a dike with sheep. It became more about the landscape itself. Jochem Myjer who bought two of my works told me: "Your images make me feel so calm". Of the 'Eiland'-series - if corona allows - a book will be published this summer and there will be an exhibition at the Photomuseum The Hague.'

Besides the exhibition and the book, Hofman has been working on Belgium. 'I started there last year until the lockdown prevented me from continuing. I then decided to check out the Zeeland coast right at the time when the Netherlands also went into lockdown. I started there in March using up the last of my savings and it turned out to be a success. A few works have since been bought by private collectors and the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its embassies. Much of my commercial work is offered to me by people who have seen my personal work and want to incorporate my style or aesthetic fingerprint into their products or projects.'

If it were up to Hofman, he would travel even further. 'I want to go to France next to combine Zeeland, Belgium and Northern France into one series under the title 'Nord' showing the diversity of the coastline. I look at it as finger exercises to take with me to America or Japan later on. In the US, I want to show landscapes with a political charge. Elderly Trump and Biden voters in golf carts, for example, photographed once again from an aerial platform. That immediately gives a charge. In Japan, I want to look for landscapes of lines and stripes.'

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- With my work, I try to register as sharply as possible what is happening now, bearing in mind the old masters of the landscape, the light of Ruisdael, the cloth fields of Philip Koninck, the city view of Vermeer and the abstraction of the early work of Mondriaan.