

Stef Fridael

The Visual Storm

Manifesto

The Visual Storm

It is often said our society has been brought back to a flat visual culture. Fun and lively for some but an image with a dark edge for others. Every day, we produce, share and consume countless images. They all need to be fast, they all need to be interesting. But as we watch, what do we actually see? There is only little time for analysis and even less time for critique as the next load of images is already underway. So how do you maintain yourself as a painter in the current visual storm?

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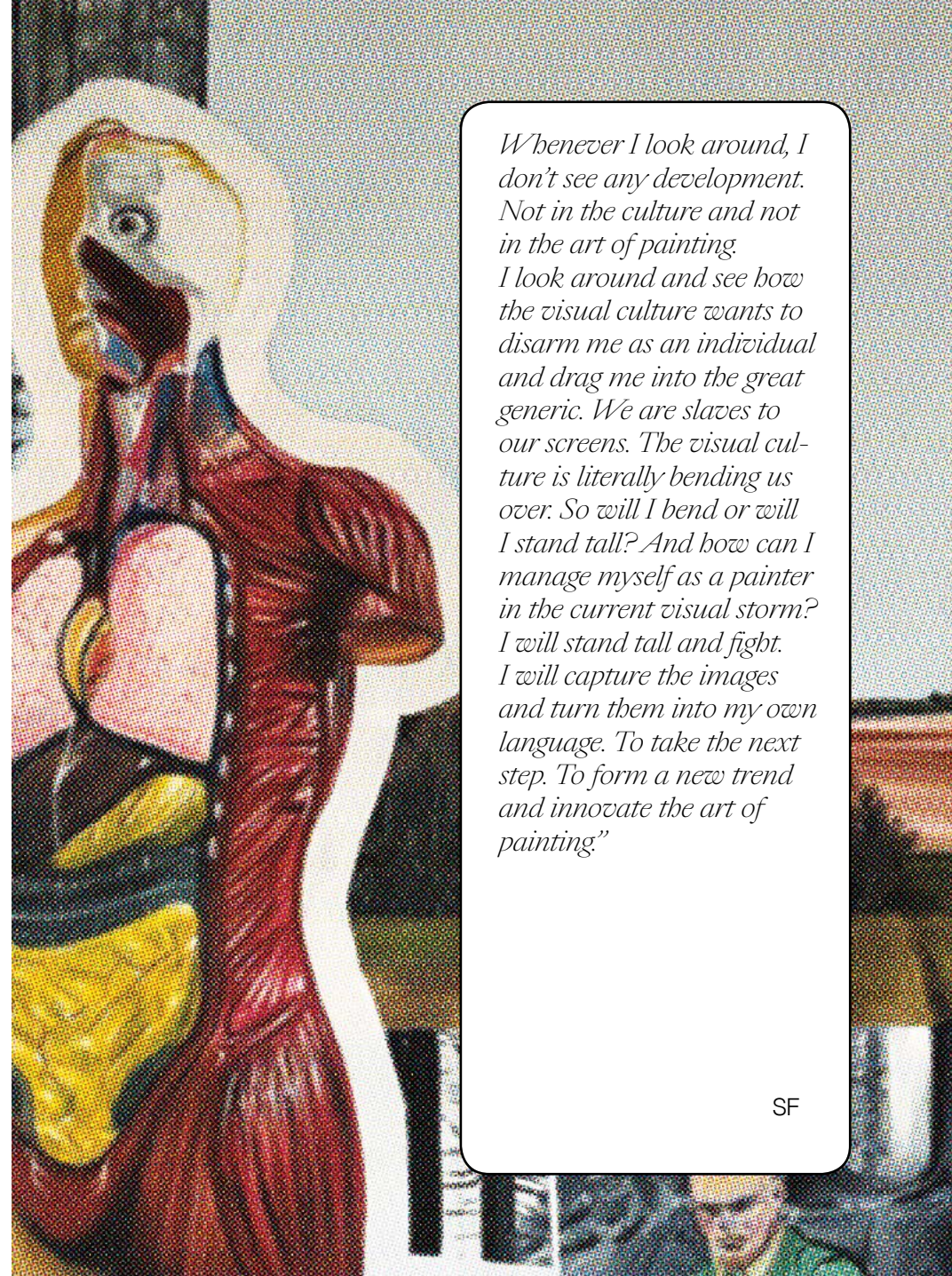
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Stimulation *without* Progression

In his essay 'The Burnout Society', Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han dictates that: "...we live in a world that is very poor in interruption; 'betweens' and 'between-times' are lacking." In the craze of the overload of stimuli, the only sure thing is repetition and (almost) nothing is new. Maybe the forced period of 'between-time' caused by the corona crisis has provided us insight and depth, but it is too early to speculate on such a thing. Let's hope so and give society the benefit of the doubt.

The modern human leads a double life: one part in physical reality and one part in the virtual world of images. In our -digitalised- visual culture, the images are taking over. They are becoming increasingly beautiful and are taking over the function of the written word and spoken language in our way of communicating. But is there, in addition to that shiny outer shell, also space for visual literacy? Some depth wouldn't go amiss during these times. In the world of the perfect image, we constantly chisel away at our own confidence. We long for control. Everything hangs on perfection, or, put more correctly, our fear of not being perfect. The visual culture is, however, mostly a clever capitalist model. We have become products, captured in sneaky algorithms that turn every form of interaction into a targeted moment of consumption.

With these developments, modern painting has been put up for sale. It seems following and being good and pretty are now also the motto in contemporary pictorial art. Any counteractions are scarce as they would probably be swept under the carpet quickly anyway. Innovation is dangerous and can lead to increased image shaming. The only thing that remains is a meagre form of art solely created as self-protection. Stef Fridael has had it. He wants to free himself from the shackles of numb perfection using his talent and his perseverance. For him, the visual culture is not a goal but simply a means. If authenticity is a way of resistance, Stef Fridael now calls for a revolution. It is time for a new visual storm.




Whenever I look around, I don't see any development. Not in the culture and not in the art of painting. I look around and see how the visual culture wants to disarm me as an individual and drag me into the great generic. We are slaves to our screens. The visual culture is literally bending us over. So will I bend or will I stand tall? And how can I manage myself as a painter in the current visual storm? I will stand tall and fight. I will capture the images and turn them into my own language. To take the next step. To form a new trend and innovate the art of painting."

SF

The Manifesto of Tomorrow

Do not become a slave to the visual culture but rather knead the images, the pulp, to a material that can be used in the authentic works of tomorrow. That is the core of 'The New Visual Storm.' Denying the visual culture is pointless, society has already been formed by the visual soup for too long. Or de-formed, however you want to interpret it. An abstract, digital world has been created that is now managed with rules and procedures. And in this technocracy, there is a permanent link between the images we are bombarded with and what we think. Because what we think dictates what images we are fed, and these images in return influence what we think. But where is the beauty in this cultural poverty? Where is the humanity?

It is about forming one's own position in the visual storm and making sure you keep a foot in the door. Both as a human and as an artist. Having insight into the visual mechanisms is therefore essential to create a place where you can weather the storm. A place to work in the eye of the storm.



"I want to be different. There was once an art collector that said he wasn't looking for artists that want to be original. Nonsense! If you want to distinguish yourself, you have to be original. And originality does not just happen to come your way. It is a struggle, sometimes it can even take years. To find your own style, create your own brand. You can clearly see it is usually the somewhat older artists that break through internationally. Why? Because they have spent years, decades finding and creating their own style. But now we only have social media artists. I don't disagree with them being artists, but for me personally it is not the ultimate form of art or even the right platform."

SF

*Where
We Are
Now*

There is not much innovation in contemporary pictorial art. No big or noticeable manifestations of a constructive desire to move forward. Not on a national, European or even a global level. Stef Fridael thinks it is time for the next step. It is time for change and innovation. He watches the artistic thinning with pain in his heart and is not afraid to take control of what he calls 'a new trend in contemporary painting.'

"Of all the arts, painting is top of the line. It is higher than music, photography and any other form of modern or classic art. It all started 45,000 years ago with the cave drawings in Sulawesi. Scientists have indicated that these drawings were not just there for aesthetical reasons but actually had a function. That means that there was an artist at work there. An artist that used his fantasies to create his life situation on that wall."

To put it bluntly, the art of painting has not moved forward for a very long time. What we see presently is that many artists do the same, they compromise with themselves to fit the ideals of the few that pull the strings in the art world. We all do the same. Throwing drops on a canvas and if they fall the right way it is all fine. And sometimes we paint a beautiful eye in between. Everybody does this. It is not art, it is decoration. They are ways in which we abandon our skills, our artistic abilities.”

SF

Where are we at now, and where is the art of painting headed in this post-pandemic time frame? It takes a while to even find the current art trend in between all the fragments. After modernism, the time of great ideas, and post-modernism that was filled with scepticism and irony, it is now time for meta-modernism, Dutch culture experts Vermeulen and Van de Akker claim. Meta-modernism comes after post-modernism and is characterised by an informed naivety. No big uprisings or rebellion, but small-scale activities which artists use to search for realness and possibilities to give meaning to a disrupted world, no matter how vague, casual or unreal. The failing of this pragmatic realism is inevitable but the attempt to try is at least worth a sticker for good behaviour.

What Stef Fridael has in mind is very different from this meta-modernism. He is against the embracing of this inevitable failing and stands for prosperity, innovation and enrichment. The goal is most evidently to be successful, it is not merely a coincidental phase in the process.

"I actively choose my own path because I want to reach the top level in everything I do. I prefer to do this together with someone else because working together is in my bones, but I do want to reach the top. This is not easy in the art world, but it is what I strive for. I have been creating art my entire life and I see myself as being authentic. Not in the sense that I am the only one who can paint, but more in the sense that in the way I can paint, I am gifted. And I cherish this gift."

SF



Fridael's *Butterfly* Net

It seems contradictory for Stef Fridael to criticise the visual culture whilst at the same time using images in his work which he then lists as examples of his new counter-trend. Yet, in Stef Fridael's craftsmanship, he opts for a conscious and logical usage of the visual storm. He uses the extreme amount of images currently available as a step up for his creative translations. It is all about the visual literacy that Fridael asks from himself, his fans and art lovers in general. Step into the visual storm with a critical and curious eye and see it as an academic manifestation in which various fields such as cultural studies, art history, critical theory, philosophy and anthropology come together. Fridael thinks of it as material we can learn from that requires a methodical approach to be redesigned into his art. A critical selection and a specific order of information that colours Fridael's thematic palette. As a net in the visual storm, to be used for the creation of a new phase in this craft. A phase that could just be the start of a new trend in art history.

“Can you express your intensity in your painting or drawing? That is what I always ask myself. And can you then transmit that intensity onto the person looking at your art. And can you then explain that it might be different from what they think? I want the intensity in my work to create a story within the mind of the viewer. Intensity is the way a painting can grab you by the use of a theme, colour, composition and size. As a painter, even before I start a painting, I am already thinking about intensity. I know what my painting should be about, and which composition and size will best fit that theme. This is what I work on every day in my atelier.”

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Who has seen the work of Stef Fridael before knows that he uses set and recognisable elements in his paintings. This storyteller ensures his figures are always painted in the highest quality. Nature, a very important element as well, is painted according to the laws of landscape painting. In his work, you can clearly distinguish defined planes that are fragmented like a puzzle and form the entire composition in a very balanced way. There are also always human figures in his paintings. Strange and questionable figures that have the same identity as other, apparent members of an undefined club and are involved with unclear activities. Fridael has added another pillar to these elements: large white labels filled with images from the collective memory, that have been painted onto the composition in a very eminent way which means the composition of the entire imagery is completely veiled.

It is exactly this last pillar that has allowed Fridael to open up a new dimension and take the next step in his craftsmanship.

"My work has evolved into art that does not just fit in with the current trend. It is not anti-art but definitely not traditional painting either. And it is especially not hip 'do what everyone else is doing' art. You might even say it is a new form or art. It has the potential to be recognised as a new art trend. There are a few elements that can be translated to contemporary culture which is all about cutting, pasting and using material and allowing life to take place on a screen of every imaginable size.

The clearly distinguishable planes in my work hint to this, as do the images that have been stuck onto the composition as a label to then create another composition. These could be seen as hints to the contemporary visual culture and its burnt-out social media usage. The beautiful images deserve to live, the bad ones we instantly throw away."

The *Cognitive* Carousel

So where is the added value of the visual literacy that Fridael values so much? What makes his style elements so special that his new works are creating a division in the perception of art and art history?

It is about the loading of the images. About the meaning we give them when we, consciously or subconsciously, save the images to our memory. It is about looking with knowledge. All images that pass us, even in nanoseconds, are fixed in a seemingly random décor. But don't be fooled, our memory selects, categorises and permanently sublimates without having to be told to do so. What can make a distinction, however, is the active stimulation of this process: knowing what you want to see, knowing what you see and then knowing in what order you want to process and save that information.

“Looking for inspiration can be torture. A fight. Finding inspiration is one thing, but using it is another. That is the ongoing struggle. The inspiration came about by thinking about the composition of the work. A composition is a mathematical whole in which I aim at balancing the images. Actually, the images have already been made, all I need to do is paint them. They are already in my head. I have this with an entire series: the composition, the painting and the imagery. While I am working on the one painting, the next one is already in my head. And this just goes on and on. I don’t actively look for series, I rather just end up with a storyline from which a number of paintings flow. I am, in essence, a storyteller. It is obvious what enters my mind via social media, the news and my direct

The understanding that all of this is a cognitive carousel in which looking and learning are closely connected, is the crux in Frida’s work. Even in his mind, images are divided into carefully chosen themes and categories that are then shaped and given meaning by his style palette. Because of their selection and composition, they are loaded. The complete image that is then created plays with the visual history and knowledge of the viewer.

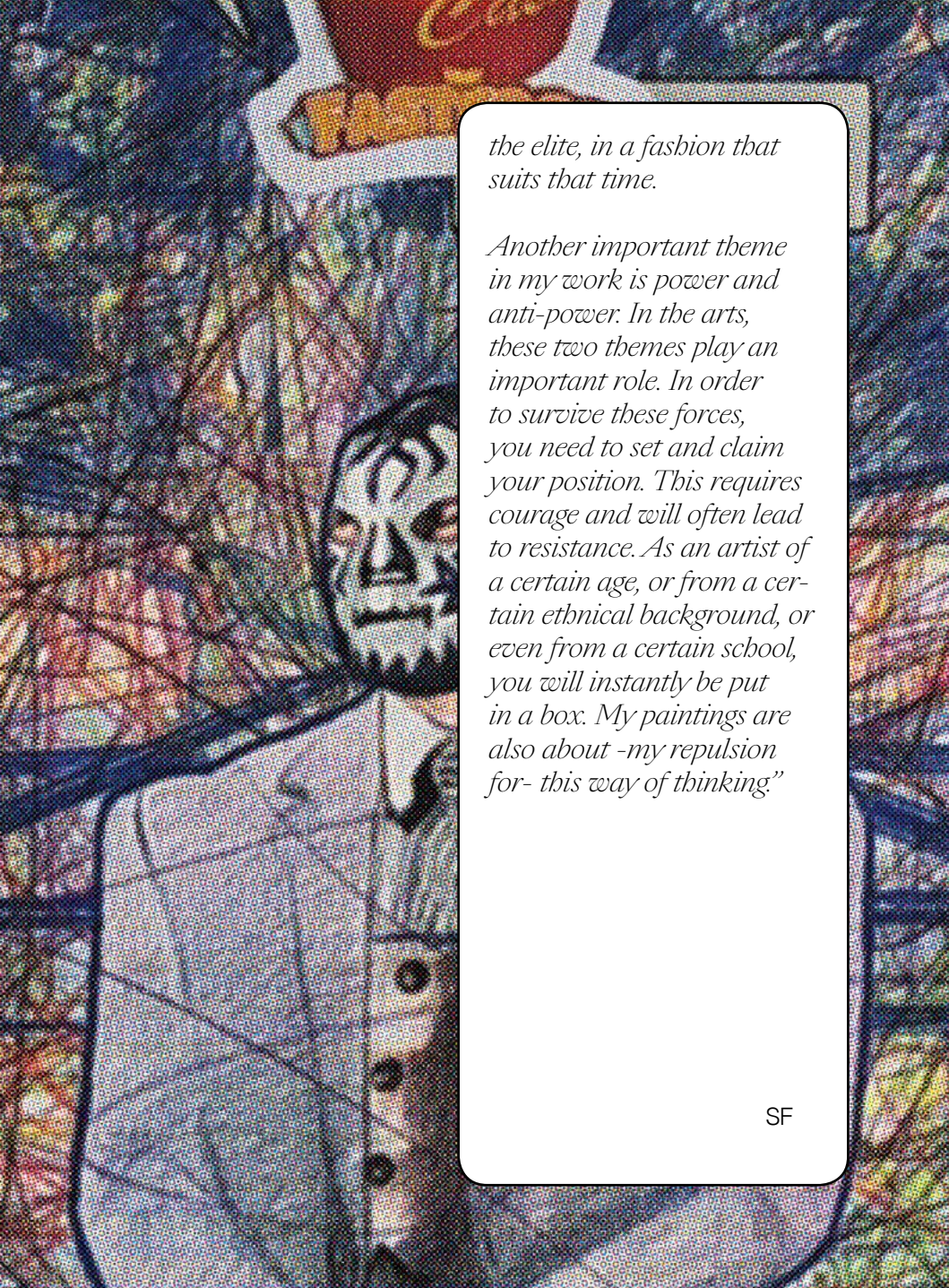
surroundings. During these times they are usually not happy things, I feel a lot of coldness and distance. But sometimes the times are a-changing and more happy, and then you will also see that in my work. I want people to look, recognise and allow any questions to rise up.”

SF

Each human has their own memory albums. These contain images from autobiographical memories that have been building up since birth, or culturally loaded images. These albums are personal but, because of the exchange and overlap with others, also form the basis for our collective memory. And this is how the game begins. Whomever is standing in front of Fridael's work will (almost instinctively) look for things they recognise. Something the work has in common with their own albums. The viewer is triggered by the fragmented construction because it appeals to the construction of the individual memory as well as the collective one. In being close to the work, there are various ways of connecting to the aesthetic memory for recognition, discovery and surprise. These are other stimuli, these are stimuli with potential. A neuro-psychological process that results in an entirely new art experience. And that is exactly what the contemporary visual culture lacks. Too often it is a one-way stream of information, an eruption of vanity and an ejaculation of conceit. Hardly ever is it aimed towards an empathic form of communication or a sublime, shared aesthetic experience.



"The wealth gap is a recurring theme in my work. The corona crisis has only increased this gap between the rich and the poor. The differences between healthy and ill, between an increase of knowledge and a stagnation of it were emphasised over and over again. The corona crisis shows the power of capitalism and life as an economic model. There is an economical elite that is uniting, and these super-rich are planning accordingly. We are so preoccupied with our own misery that we are unaware of what is going on in the bigger picture. Is it positive, is it negative? That is exactly what I want to touch upon with my work. The people in my paintings are not the people of this day and age. They are people from when the elite was in power, towards the end of the 18th, beginning of the 19th century. The wealthy bourgeoisie,



the elite, in a fashion that suits that time.

Another important theme in my work is power and anti-power. In the arts, these two themes play an important role. In order to survive these forces, you need to set and claim your position. This requires courage and will often lead to resistance. As an artist of a certain age, or from a certain ethnical background, or even from a certain school, you will instantly be put in a box. My paintings are also about -my repulsion for- this way of thinking."

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In this new creative phase, in this dance with visual culture that swings between attraction and repulsion, Frida's recurring themes and story lines are given a new layer. In his compositions, he touches on the large themes that characterise him and our society, and that divide it, with the utmost precision. Large canvasses, large stories. The pain-points that his themes incorporate sometimes create works of art that might feel uncomfortable. They can be threatening, unpredictable, but also intriguing and give the viewer a feeling of astonishment or compassion. There is always more to see than what you think you see. Finally.

A Manifesto for *the Arts* and *the* Artist

During a day and age where artists do not dare to step outside of the box because of a fear to be criticised by self-proclaimed experts, Stef Fridael sees room for innovation. The pandemic has been the catalyst for the forming of this thinking and now is the time to step outside and introduce this Visual Storm Manifesto. It is a manifesto for belief, hope and innovation.

A no-nonsense manifesto, pro a new step in the art of painting with a loving kick up the routines and parked ambitions in the art world when needed. This plea for innovation in painting is also a call to a stronger manifestation of the artist. Do not allow yourself to succumb to the new normal and the obedience that comes with it. Stick up for your identity and individuality. Stef Fridael combines skill and person, he chooses to ignore the ideas of the current 'woke' culture and trusts his gut, talent and character to allow him to reach his highest goal. No shine without friction.

“This manifesto is about painting. If you can work from the figurative to the abstract, it’s perfect. If you can work from the abstract to the figurative it is also perfect. But if you can’t do one or the other, you can’t paint. It all starts with the art of painting. You have to be able to paint a Dutch landscape with the intensity you think it deserves, and you have to be able to paint a great portrait. You have to be able to paint a full allegory. Or, in short, you have to be a complete painter. I am urging all painters that recognise themselves in my words to stand behind this manifesto and follow me in that what I think is most important for the art of painting. Do not copy, but use in your own way, in your own style. Join me!”

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How do you
maintain
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