

WILD WALLS #4



We all had bigger dreams to follow

Sanne Rous

The German artist Hannah Höch (1889-1978) was the only woman to be included among those in the first international Dada exhibition held in Berlin in 1920. Dada was a male bastion, and for many years Höch's role was reduced to that of Dadaist Raoul Hausmann's lover. Not until the early 1970s was serious consideration given to her work. In order to support herself Höch worked as a graphic designer for the publishing house Ullstein. She is regarded as a pioneer of photomontage; illustrated magazines obtained via the publisher were often the source of material for her work. In her collages Höch questions the female stereotype that was predominant in magazines such as *Die Dame* and *Blatt der Hausfrau*. Handicraft patterns found in those magazines appear in her collages, into which she also incorporated photographs of machine parts, children's drawings, portraits and quotes by writers.

When Sanne Rous began seeking another source of income to supplement that of her work as a visual artist, she wondered what sorts of odd jobs artists had done throughout the ages and whether these had influenced their artistic practice. The question resulted in a study and a series which presently consists of twenty-five diptychs, each of which shows a portrait of an artist, drawn on paper, paired with a painting of the 'odd job' held by the artist concerned. On view in *Wild Walls #4* is a selection of ten such diptychs. Added to this is a

drawn portrait of Hannah Höch, with her characteristic pageboy hairstyle, flanked by *Designer Sewing Patterns* (2020), a painting in black-and-white hues depicting an open workbook that contains notes and sketches. (1)

The biographies of the artists proved to be a source of information and inspiration. For Rous the series of diptychs relates to the fundamental issue as to the meaning of being an artist by profession, the conception of work, as well as to the relationship between art and craft, or art and economics. Rous: "The earliest artist that I included in the series [not the selection of ten works, PT] is Titian. He had a reputation as the wealthiest artist of the age. Although he earned an ample income as the official painter of the Venetian Republic, he managed to augment this considerably by investing his money in the timber trade that was flourishing during that time. This image of a rich and successful artist was, however, an exception rather than the rule. In the nineteenth century the position of the artist as a craftsman had, once and for all, transformed into that of the autonomous, self-reliant artist. Particularly during the age of Romanticism, the artist is someone who remains on the fringes of society, an original and talented individual who pursues a personal passion to create. Hard work and poverty are part of this. For women of that time it was especially difficult to develop a reputation as an artist. They were either dependent on a wealthy family, who could provide financial support, or they worked in the studio of a male artist, just as Camille Claudel worked under Rodin."

In the diptychs of *Wild Walls #4* we see, through the eyes of Sanne Rous, the chemistry that takes place between the biography, the oeuvre, the social context and the position of art in society. Her work is distinguished by an entirely idiosyncratic and 'earthy' range of hues, a quick and confident brushstroke, and a talent for achieving a monumental image in a small format. Rous manages to tell a story without getting bogged down in the anecdotal. She has, for instance, drawn a delicate portrait of Agnes Martin (8) and combined it with a painting which involves two sheets of paper painted in 'Martin' grey and a list of more than thirty odd jobs. A moving work.

The drawn portrait of Henri Rousseau (2) hangs next to a hilly landscape seen through a half-open gate. There he is, *Le Douanier*, eyeing this inviting landscape from the side. Andy Warhol's (4) secondary occupation as a shoe designer becomes visible in a nearly abstract image comprising two rows of elegant colorful shoes. Almost folksy in its romanticism is the painting showing Serge Poliakoff (5), who fled the disasters of the Russian Revolution, making ends meet by playing the balalaika in Constantinople in 1920. For a long time after his arrival in Paris, and subsequent success as a major figure of the École de Paris, he continued to support himself with the balalaika. His portrait is distinguished by a serious gaze.

Photographer Diane Arbus (3) is portrayed in a frontal manner and has an ambiguous gaze, directed both outward and inward. An autonomous portrait with dark undercurrents. The depicted interior of a photography studio, where lamps are aimed at an unoccupied stool, has a monumental character in terms of the image as well as its significance. Sanne Rous has given her series the title *We all had bigger dreams to follow*. And that may well say enough.

1. Hannah Höch
Designer Sewing Patterns, 2020
(for magazines like Die Dame and Blatt der Hausfrau, published by Ullstein Verlag)
oil on canvas, 32 x 40 cm
portrait: pencil on paper, 21 x 15 cm
€ 2.700 (VAT excluded)
2. Henri Rousseau
Douanier, 2020
oil on canvas, 24 x 20 cm
portrait: pencil on paper, 21 x 15 cm
€ 1.950 (VAT excluded)
3. Diane Arbus
Freelance Photographer, 2020
(for New York Times Magazine, Esquire, Harper's Bazaar)
oil on canvas, 24 x 24 cm
portrait: pencil on paper, 21 x 15 cm
€ 2.050 (VAT excluded)
4. Andy Warhol
Shoe Designer, 2019
oil on canvas, 27 x 37 cm
portrait: pencil on paper, 21 x 15 cm
€ 2.450 (VAT excluded)
5. Serge Poliakoff
Balalaika Player, 2020
oil on canvas, 30 x 20 cm
portrait: pencil on paper, 21 x 15 cm
€ 2.100 (VAT excluded)
6. Robert Ryman
Museum Guard, 2020
oil on canvas, 26 x 30 cm
portrait: pencil on paper, 21 x 15 cm
€ 2.250 (VAT excluded)
7. Richard Serra
Steel Mill Worker, 2019
oil on canvas, 24 x 30 cm
portrait: pencil on paper, 21 x 15 cm
€ 2.200 (VAT excluded)

8. Agnes Martin
I Have Worked as... , 2019
oil on canvas, 28 x 32 cm
portrait: pencil on paper, 21 x 15 cm
€ 2.350 (VAT excluded)

9. Philip Glass
Plumber, 2019
oil on canvas, 30 x 24 cm
portrait: pencil on paper, 21 x 15 cm
€ 2.200 (VAT excluded)

10. Jeff Koons
Stockbroker, 2019
oil on canvas, 30 x 35 cm
portrait: pencil on paper, 21 x 15 cm
€ 2.500 (VAT excluded)