

Ron Amir

The young Israeli artist Ron Amir, now 30 years old, graduated this year at the Royal Academy in The Hague. He is one of the four artists whose work is exhibited in October in the GEM at a KABK graduate's festival in The Hague. Amir is slightly older than the average academy student, as he decided to become an artist only after finishing the military service and subsequently going to Italy. After finishing his education there he ended up in the Netherlands.

Amir draws and makes graphic art and by doing so is one of the many young people who has chosen the classical art of painting and drawing as a basic principle. Nowadays, this almost seems like a statement and is true that Amir, who later in our conversation, will compare the classical art of painting and drawing to the other more modern art forms, such as video and conceptual art. But his choice is the result of a great passion, not the consequence of a reactionary train of thought.

"Drawing for me, as a child, was the way to express myself and the passion for drawing has remained. Israel has a real peculiar relationship with 'image'. As you may know, in Jewish culture it has been forbidden for many centuries to depict religious stories. To me 'image' was very important and when I ended up in Italy after my military service, I closed myself off from Israel and succumbed to the arts; Michelangelo, Bellini, Caravaggio. I believe I was angry and disappointed for being cut off from these images for so long."

Amir's most important works of art are large charcoal paper drawings. Large, that is to say, one and a half to two and a half metres and larger, the whole surface filled with an abundance of events and images. The images of cars, interiors, people and situations are linked in such a way that, on first sight, individual scenes cannot be distinguished. The images form a woven pattern which fills up all edges of the surface. One could, in principal, continue to work on them if one wanted to. This is not only the case in thought. In reality Amir could extend the image. When talking about the drawing which is exhibited in the GEM, he says he is planning to make the drawing twice as large. One half of the drawing now and the other half in a later stage. If you take a longer look at Amir's works of arts you will distinguish themes and patterns. The first things that leap out are the cars.

"Cars are often depicted in my drawings. I think the car is one of the most important symbols of our time. The car expresses mobility, personal pride, danger and joy. It links war zones, Iraq, Israel."

When I look at his cars, I immediately think of Federico d'Orazio's work who also uses the car, real cars and car crashes to express a humanistic political view of the world.

"The car, Amir continues, but also animals, are always present in my work. It is the strange relationship between man and animal. Animals have lost their freedom, their existence is linked to that of man, it has been overrun, changed and twisted. Take for instance, gene manipulation in the bio industry."

And I think about the South African writer J.M.Goetzee who raised the metaphor comparing the bio industry to the harsh relationship between men.

"And then there is always a moment when I depict myself, Amir says." He points at a bold man sitting on a chair at the head of the table. "Look, behind his back you see a brush. Art is confusing, at least it is confusing to me, a lot of the time. Everything is possible, everything is allowed, everything happens in abundance. A lot of art is made of which I am not sure I would recognise it as such if it were displayed in the street instead of in a museum. In relation to the past, it seems as though there has been a turnaround. In earlier centuries art was considered to be special. Artists created their images, which might be admired after their death because of some extraordinary skill. Today you are just one of many artists who create images and you are never sure if these images will ever stand out as being special. And then of course, there is the book, a book." Amir points at a book on a drawing table somewhere.

"My work is not political, I don't value politics at all, the stupid decisions that are made, again and again, it's about people. The impressions I make derive from the thought what I would see and think if I could look at the earth from another planet. Heaven and hell, it all comes together like in Dante's 'La Divina Commedia'."

What I admire in Amir's work is that in the concrete images and situations there is always the presence of amazement, as if next to the patterns which are put into words so well, a second, third and fourth level exists where thoughts, emotions and personality linger. It is not just about directing. It is about experiencing, living, questions are asked. Ron Amir's personal passion for drawing and expressive art is a vehicle and the expression itself.

In addition to his drawings Ron Amir's has now also applied himself to making etchings and when he shows me the first prints I am surprised at the result. He uses all the classical technical tricks to make small sized etchings – as small as the original sized copper engravings by Dürer or Goltzius. In the middle of modern video and painting violence a remarkable intimate and detailed exception. I put on my glasses.

"Maybe it is strange to work with such a small size, but it is very important to me. It signifies the way I look at and love works of art. To let your eyes stray across the surface of a drawing, a print or a painting and then to observe all the details. This is what I probably expect the spectator to do, to follow my eyes."

Saskia Monshouwer