

Joëlle Delhovren

GALLERY

> 9.2.2008 Do/je/Th > za/sa/Sa 14.30 > 18.30

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YVES DE VRESSE



A CERTAIN DIGNITY

EN Marked by life, you could call the models that Joëlle Delhovren paints. Her portraits are merciless. Absolutely no attempt is made to present reality as more beautiful than it is. A cool observer, Delhovren (born in Brussels in 1959) zooms in on imperfections, great and small. There is also no setting to put prettify things. With a few exceptions, the backgrounds of her paintings play no part in the narrative. And it is precisely this pitiless approach, this surgical, dissecting gaze at reality – given form by a forceful painter's touch – that gives a certain dignity to the characters in these fine canvasses. Their resignation to their fate, with the occasional questioning look, transfers the discomfiture from the subject of this investigation to the observer. Without being immediately thrust into the role of voyeur, the viewer is put in an uncomfortable position. In those few paintings that do contain some accessories or interior features (a bathtub with a plastic duck, a balloon, or piglets) the artist seems willing to allow us into her own intimate environment. The snapshot, anecdotal style of these works is not, to my mind, that successful. Just as the private photo albums of good neighbours can rarely move us, here too the more universal dimension that Delhovren brings to her powerful portraits is lacking. But these minor imperfections should certainly not put you off visiting this exhibition, which also includes works on paper and sketchbooks. These reveal another aspect of the artist's personality: via free visual and textual associations, we are given a look inside her world. Watercolours, collages, and fragments of text sometimes form the starting points of subsequent paintings; but sometimes not. It is as if we are being given a brief look inside an intimate diary...and begin to feel somewhat voyeuristic.

Ill.: Joëlle Delhovren : 'Untitled 3' (2006- Oil on canvass - 70x70cm)