

Light at the end — Bram Kinsbergen

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Making an image of an important moment allows us to preserve our experience. Long after the moment has passed, we look at the image. Once again we experience what we felt in that moment. But there is also less of a danger here. Today, everyone has a digital camera with almost endless storage capacity, we are faced with a proliferation of images. We no longer experience the moment, we only capture it and never look back. The experience is gone; everyone makes the same meaningless images.

Bram Kinsbergen (b. 1984, Belgium) works intuitively, he paints what touches him and is driven by the desire for something original. Sometimes this leads to carefully constructed compositions, with views and a subtle play between the front, middle, and back plan in which imagination and experience intertwine. But he also paints portraits of the people dear to him, at a moment of the day that is dear to him. In *Light at the end*, we see examples of both. What unites these works, besides a smooth mastery of the medium of painting, is the careful attention to the power of an image.

Kinsbergen knows how ambivalent that power can be. Many paintings in this exhibition show a landscape that feels exotic. There are palm trees, tropical plants, waterways, and canoes. In a world permeated by digital images, and in which everything and everyone has been captured on screen a thousand times, we long for something original, something pristine and away from the digital. That desire is depicted in these paintings, but it is not innocent. . .

In a sense, we are being fooled. Kinsbergen based his compositions on existing images, on photos from tourist brochures and reports. This is not a coincidence. An image can retain and recall an original experience, but too many images can destroy the experience. Instead of paying attention to our surroundings, we endlessly scroll past the images on our smartphones. Instead of capturing the original moments in our day, we hunger for faraway places. The tourism industry and lifestyle bloggers cleverly respond to this desire, which may not be as far removed from the colonial gaze as we think. Colonialism also hungered to discover new places, and in doing so it exacted great violence on people and nature. We still see its impact today, also in the way in which nature itself has been completely exploited.

Kinsbergen plays with these themes in *Light at the end*. Light is central in many of the paintings. Sometimes it is sunlight breaking through the clouds or on the horizon, sometimes it is the pale moonlight brightening the dark water or piercing the night sky like a tiny dot. Sometimes it's the warm light of a fire, sometimes the shiny light of a smartphone. Kinsbergen looks for warm, natural light, but knows that today we are mainly attracted to the shiny light of our smartphones.

And yet *Light at the end* is a hopeful exhibition. In this exhibition, Kinsbergen also shows portraits of people close to him. They engage in normal activities, although their faces sometimes seem like glimpses into another world. Ultimately, we don't have to look far for warmth and light, Kinsbergen seems to say. At the end of the day, it is not the lure of the smartphone or the distant place that counts, but the time we spend with loved ones. As the sun sets, we share the fact that we are together. That's hopeful, the light at the end. Kinsbergen manages to capture this clearly in his paintings.

Text by Bram Ieven