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Ruimte voor Actuele Beeldende Kunst Space for Contemporary Art

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“Where Angels Fear to Tread”

Angelo Evelyn

05/04/2009 - 03/05/2009

Angelo Evelyn

° 1942 –St. John, Canada

<http://www.angeloevelyn.com>

Evelyn studeerde natuurkunde in Vancouver (Canada), waarna hij in verschillende wetenschappelijke functies werkzaam was. Zijn artistieke carrière begon hij in 1970 als autodidact in Montreal (Canada). Vanaf 1979 studeerde hij grafiek en schilderen aan de Kunsthogeschool in Bremen en West-Berlijn (Duitsland). Vanaf 1983 werkte hij als professioneel kunstenaar in Parijs, Aken, Québec en Scandinavië. Verder was hij als gastdocent in steendruk verbonden aan de Kunstacademie in Trondheim, Straatsburg en aan verschillende open ateliers in Canada en West Europa. In 1998 heeft hij in Eichstätt (Duitsland) met twee Duitse collega-kunstenaars een lithografie atelier opgericht als ontmoetingsplaats voor internationale kunstenaars. Sinds 1993 heeft hij zich met zijn gezin in Nederland gevestigd.

Angelo Evelyn

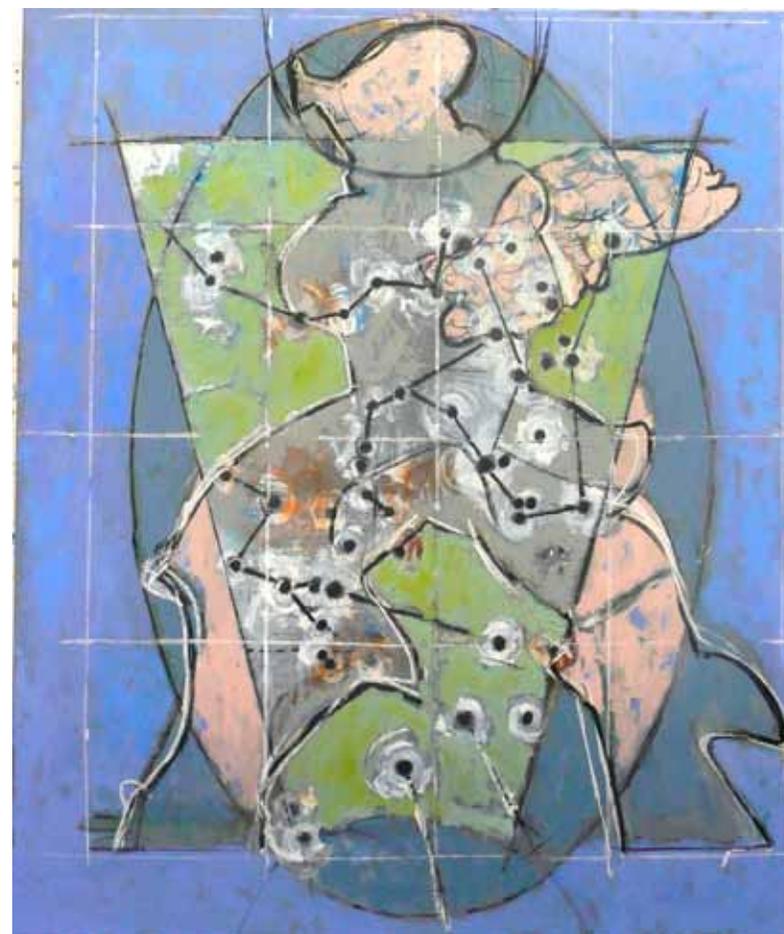
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Evelyn studied physics and mathematics in Vancouver (Canada). Before commencing his art career as an autodidact in Montreal in 1970. He began his formal art education in 1979 at the art academy in Bremen. After receiving his diploma in 2D design in 1983, he deepened his knowledge of printmaking, in particular stone lithography by taking part in various advanced workshops at the “Hochschule der Kunst” (Berlin, Germany) in 1984; the “Frans Masereel Centrum”, Kasterlee (Belgium) in 1986 and the RhoK, Brussels (Belgium) in 1987. Since 1983 he has worked and exhibited as an independent artist in Canada, Western Europe and Scandinavia. In 1990-he taught as a guest lecturer in printmaking at the state art academy “KIT” in Trondheim (Norway). In 1993 he moved with his family from Norway to the Netherlands settling in the Rotterdam area.



A strange new constellation



Mr. Future

Andreas Weiland

NOTES ON FIVE RECENT PAINTINGS BY ANGELO EVELYN

Angelo Evelyn's work has again and again returned to sujets that are technological or that in some amazing way touched upon questions of science. It may have to do with his formation as a physicist or with his keen awareness of ecological problems. It is enough to think of 'North Sea Landscape' and 'Fischers Fritz' or, say, the works of the Global Warming Series.

On other occasions, this artist has shown a propensity to look closely and in fact lovingly at concrete everyday objects. Works of Jim Dine come to mind who shared the same love of a craftsman for the beauty of, say, a saw blade, a hammer, a shovel. The isolation of the object, the careful visual approach to its aesthetic qualities is nothing completely new in modern art. It is found in a cool, and yet provocative way, in works by Duchamps, for instance the famous urinal.

This is not the way Angelo Evelyn looks at the world. The provocation, if it is there, is different, less intellectual, less conceptual. The flesh and blood of our way to exist, the 'guts' can be sensed so often quite acutely in the physical act of painting that he engages in.

A work like 'The Miracle of Flight' (2008) is, to my mind, in some way situated in the tradition of Dine. And then, again, clearly transcends it. What reminds me of Dine is the atmosphere evoked by the colors of this work, an atmosphere that surpasses the sterile visual reality of a book full of images of airplanes, destined for students of engineering or aircraft design.

There is something magical to these planes. If childhood memories gave rise to the theme, an interest in the war planes of the early 1940s or the small planes that make locations in the Canadian wilderness accessible, the fascination of the child or teenager has been transformed into memory, and the memory has given rise to, in part, blurred images and dreamlike colors.

And yet, the montage of these images amounts to a strategy that was dear already to Constructivists, also to Dadaists, even to Surrealist artists. The Surrealist heritage here comes closest to what Angelo Evelyn developed. Montage is no calculated, rational act to him, I surmise, sensing the production process that underlies what I see. It is spontaneous, to a large extent: intuition, mixed with knowledge – the knowledge of the craftsman, the painter, that such an option exists and can be tested concretely. And that it can undergo a metamorphosis in the act of painting.

The metamorphosis comes about when the lines, the boundaries of the pieces that make up the montage become blurred, when we see them painted over, here and there, when the constructeur's or the engineer's cross-section or aerial view of a plane is subjected to overpainting, a break with a naturalistic application of color. We get several cross-sections of the entire plane, one frontal view, one from above, one view each of 2 different parts of the plane, both being wings seen in isolation, from above. Vertebrae are inserted, adding a further layer. This is, perhaps, a metaphor for control and also something organic, forming a curving line, like a snake. Then, there is also an elephant, represented by no more than an outline and splashes of color. It is flying through the blue of the sky. There are toy-like figures, winged toys with pig-like snouts that hover in the air. One plane, given by way of its cross-section, has a whirring propeller indicated by white and pink sketchy elongated vertical splashes of color. It is enough to evoke motion, the perception of flight: a small plane steadily on its way. An inserted dark fragment of a square with a captured frog dancing inside it could be no more than a boulder lying next to the runway.

The enigmatic, seemingly strong and heavy-looking object partly covering sight of the large view of the plane's wings is in fact a rough or approximative representation of a sculpture done by Henry Moore. Clearly, in its heaviness it is the opposite, the contradiction of flying machines. It is also functioning like a connecting and, at the same time, a separating element, holding apart different visual spaces of the work, different scales and thus, sizes of planes, different segments of the sky or the ground. Needless to say, this dream of flying machines can do without a central perspective. We can screen it with our eyes, getting lost in the labyrinth of shapes and colors.

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In a way, 'The Miracle of Flight II' (2008) is a cooler version dedicated to the same sujet. While echoing the first work, it is still an entirely different painting. The blue of the sky that the black outlines of planes are set in, constitutes a unitary, almost illusionist space. Insofar, any thought of montage is to be excluded. A relatively abstract or 'constructive' quality of the planes that were initially drawn in the way an engineer would draw them for an encyclopedia article is only halfway present. It is transcended by variations in the thickness of the lines, their strength or forcefulness, the changing solidity of black. And it is at the same time put in question by a repeated and determined blurring of the plane outlines, in other words, by occasional overpainting that avoids to cover the lower layer too thoroughly, as the artist rather prefers to let it shine through, to a greater or lesser extent.

Strange elements are inserted, elements known already from other works done by this painter. There are all the angels of Giotto, for instance, depicted in the way a pop artist might do it, which lets no room for any sweetness while creating an ambivalence that is close to the tongue-in-cheek though not the ironic. There is a black square with an inserted animal again, as well as a schematically indicated human brain, and a large key.



Miracle of Flight I



The Miracle of Flight II



Ikarus

White clouds seem to drift in the blue sky. A propeller is whirring, as in the other work of the same series that evokes the 'miracle of flight.' I wonder what element, which association, is stronger: the wonder and threat of flying machines used in peace and war, or the irritation caused by the hovering angels of early modern art that already visualized man's longing to have wings and traverse the air. Just as the toys of kids traverse it for short moments when they throw them as high as they can and watch them fall down again. Blue splashes, the serenity of blue, meanwhile, gets into our eyes like smoke in the famous song, and other colors add a fairy tale note to it.

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Years ago, Angelo Evelyn, to whom we also owe the next work, named 'Cetus / The Whale', was living in Norway, painting landscapes, seascapes, visions of oil platforms but also large whales. Sometimes memories of a warship entered his mind, connected with the war he had heard about, firsthand, as a kid. And thus, there were images of the sea, of destroyers and submarines. None of them heroic. But grim as the North Atlantic in late fall or during the winter.

'Cetus / The whale' is a painting that takes up an earlier painting - a metamorphosis of a painting remembered that in turn remembered whaling and what is part of it: salt water, factory ships, the process of dissecting these large lovely mammals.

The colors of this work, like those of some other recent paintings by Angelo Evelyn (for instance, 'The Discovery of Frobisher Bay') have a distinct Northern quality: the harsh, or should I say, hard, precise, brisk clarity that colors assume when objects are seen in Northern light, in places like Norway or Canada, on a cold, very intensely sunny day. And the light of the sun seems to be more intense at the coast, or when you are at sea on a calm, windless or at least cloudless day.

The monumental, longish painting has certain traits of a triptych, with the middle section standing out somewhat higher than the left and right section. Is the formal choice of a triptych an indication that a 'religious' reading is possible - that the painting can be seen as a kind of remembrance of (if not homage to) the martyred, crucified animal?

The parts of the whale afloat above sea level are grey and greenish, really fishy, that is to say, fish/meat/like, and rotting in the light of day.

The parts that are in the water are much darker:

A thin band of blue color indicating the intruding presence of water separates the upper and lower segments of the whale cut in parts. And still, the parts seem to swim as if there remained a virtual life, a completeness or eternity of existing and swimming on and on that refuses to die and become portioned and sold to connoisseurs.

Irritating patches of red, like flames, glow in the corpse of the vast animal.

Lines connect and hold the parts together, like a helpful net. They are lines that connect the stars of a star constellation. Forming another layer of the work, they have also sunk into or are mirrored by the sea.

All around the animal, we see angels hovering, drifting in lucid blue air; drifting in the dark waters of an imaginary Atlantic Ocean. Do they sing a song of mourning? Do they protect what can no longer be protected when it has been dissected? Do they long to make nature whole again, healing the wounds, closing the split? How classical Giotto's angels have become again, in this painting! Classical, serious, and very modern.

Somewhere a green cod seems to swim and sneak past the tragedy of slaughter; the slaughter of a beautiful whale. A dotted sky, the grid of the ocean that is full of endless nets that promise profit to the whaling industry; they are only one of so many layers of this work, layers that combine elements we encounter again and again in other works by this artist. And perhaps therein, in this layering, this combination done intuitively, perhaps, rests the real mystery of this work.

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What is it that strikes me more in Angelo Evelyn's most recent work? The freshness and intensity of the colors? Or the almost mythological quality of the imagery, whether it's whales (like Moby Dick, in this case briefly referred to as Cetus), planes (that is to say, flying machines we could have seen 60 years back from now, in what was almost another age, technologically speaking - the time when flying was young, a recent experience and an intrinsically lonely adventure)? Or, as here, in 'Ikarus falling', the evocation of human beings who dream of flying...? Ikarus, falling and falling, in his dreams! Or man, or woman, in the act of love-making, of 'flying', then, falling rudely or terribly perhaps, into a state of loneliness.

This work is, to me, a revocation of Blake. William Blake, the poet, spoke of the marriage of heaven and hell, referring by this to the presence and union of opposites, heavenly and terror-stricken or panicky. That contradiction, that ambivalence is present in 'Ikarus falling', as well. The upper reaches of the painting are filled with the golden streaming glow of an invisible sun. The lower ones with the azure blue of a far away, imaginary sea. Or is it just colors, nothing representational for you, but simply the tension or correlation of yellows, glowing wonderful yellows and almost turquoise blues? Set into the middle of the



Cetus the whale



Brandstifters



Circus Acrobats

canvas and stepping between a heavenly sky and an equally paradisaical sea is the dark blue of night, rising above the curved horizon of that imaginary sea like King Kong was rising among the skyscrapers of New York. The blue of night, it is; the winged blue of night, raising its frightful head like the mythical figures of Blake rise in his poetry: the figures that represented doom, tyranny, repression, counter-revolution when America was shaking off the shackles of despotic Britain. When the peasants of France threw off the chains of serfdom. And yet, the danger of tyranny returning was there, and remained in the air: Until today, when Ikarus is falling. And Ikarus is modern man, Ikarus is two shapes two outlines, one filled with dark green, another with a dark brownish red. It's a despaired figure, despairing figure - maybe male, maybe female. Falling, head on, in the left part of the painting. And with its feet first, its legs first, in the right part.

Apparently a stencil was used to produce this shape which is also serving to hold the upper world and the lower part of the universe of this painting together. Ikarus is falling from one of these worlds into the other; and he's also the bridge that links them, visually. So much is clear. But other species seem to fall as well, or hover in mid-air: Is that the carcass of a pig, next to the 'green' Ikarus? Is there the shape of a dog or a fat rabbit, legs up in the air, ears flapping seawards, downwards, while it's accompanying the slow descent of Ikarus?

A blueish, smaller Ikarus seems to sail seawards, as well. Almost unnoticed by most, perhaps, in its position close to the right edge of the canvas. Even more unnoticed still, a companion piece, a counterpart of this, on the left. And blue, too, there is that winged Dracula with the head that is half-human and halfway, a bird head, with big beak and the sharp eyes of a bird of prey. Strange mythical birds fly in the sky. Angels drift and fly and accompany the fall of Ikarus. On one of these angels, a small horny devil seems to ride. The imagery thus is not free of sexual allusions. But it also incorporates hopes. Hopes focused on human creativity, human productivity - and perhaps the fears that are attached to it, given our most recent historic experience.

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Looking at 'Circus Acrobats', I see a visual space filled by flaming, glowing, sometimes almost golden light – a bit reminiscent of the color of sunrises painted by Turner. But this is not Turner. Is it closer to Pop Art or to Surrealist works, a magical realism perhaps? Though certainly not as starkly bright as such magical realism appears to be these days, in South America or the Philippines. In the midst of this work, enclosed by the blossoming areas of warm, yellow sunlight, there is the emptiness of blue: the blue air; the light blue sky, outside a circus tent. I see, in this sky, a magical firework.

Then, I notice the chair. I see: a table. Or is it bar stool? And a clownesque green animal, of uncertain identity, jumping amidst the lines of a star constellation.

Slaughtered pigs or cows seem to swing in the air like trapeze artists. One of them is balancing a tray with what maybe apples or bombs with their fuses burning.

The face of the slaughtered animal to the left wears an astonished expression. Its eyes: blue and shiny. Red lobsters seem to hover in mid-air. And all of this is surrounded by angels, angels with halos that are golden. A color that makes them starkly present.

The work, as most or all of the works here discussed, is part of a series entitled 'Where Angels Fear to Tread'. And this is an apt indication of a shared topic indeed. Faced with the uncertainties, the horrors of a world, a humanity that is like a car going down a dead-end street full-speed, perhaps we need guardian angels, angels like those young angelic kids that took to the streets in Seattle Stockholm and Genoa; angels that warn us like Arundhati Roy and Noam Chomsky and Angelo Evelyn. Angels that invoke our self-protective, humane energies, our capacity to love rather than destroy or chase or aim at vast profits. Angels that make us protectors of our world's beauty, of its diversity, its human presence, the presence of its animals plants mountains rivers and vast blue seas.

Rotterdam, January 24, 2009



The Green Hand



Mummies I