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Interview with Toon Verhoef by Marcel Vos

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M. V.: *Generally we regard the titles for figurative paintings as being normal. The titles for abstract paintings, if they exist, make us think for a while. You don't give titles to your paintings.*

T. V.: Not anymore.

When did you stop doing this?

Twenty years ago. Since then I've never given a title to a painting. Before that time, though, I did lots of drawings in which I played a great deal with titles. Those titles were never intended as a key to the work or as a naming but more as a foreign body, with which I, perhaps unconsciously, attempted to make the properties of the image self-sufficient. In other words, a title which is all-too-obviously foreign, like a false element, like something not belonging to the image which is used, by way of the friction between the two, to objectify the image. I stopped with this, very simply, because I came to the realization that this was, in the most favorable sense, a kind of silliness which, in the end, became too contrived and, in the unfavorable sense, was becoming pretentious and boring. In any case, I never had the idea, even when I was using titles, that a title could clarify anything about the image. I sooner misused them in order to create confusion... and that became boring. Since then I never felt the need, certainly not to provide a key to a painting by means of a title, but also not to create a decor or climate through a title, which would help you to look at a painting. It became excess baggage.

Now you would see a title as an interference, as something which distracts the attention of the viewer or sets it on the wrong track.

There are titles and there are titles. When you call a painting no. 131, like Clifford Still did, then it also has a title. Stella gives titles to all of his works, names of places for instance. But then it isn't intended as «naming» but as «cataloging», as distinguishing between one work and the other.

What do you think of the way Marlene Dumas uses titles?

I've thought about that... I don't know if that's meant for publication... but when I dealt with Marlene at the ateliers, that was a big point of discussion between us. I've often talked with her about the fact that you always had to try to discover the extent to which you could make a thing without the necessity of a title. Only that could lead to the search for the real strength and meaning of the image. But a perfect example of intensity and personality is that she's prepared to find a form for the relationship between object and title, something which you no longer experience at all as being

false or problematic. On the contrary. You can't say that a work is made better by a title, no more than you can say it's made worse if you leave out the title; the title becomes a part of the work. That's something different than cataloging, and it's especially something totally different from banal, embarrassing titles like «misery».

So you don't work with titles. To what extent do you know what a painting will become when you start to work on it?

I pretend beforehand that I know this exactly. I couldn't imagine starting on a painting without knowing precisely where to begin. I've never yet had empty canvases or blank sheets of paper which I just start to work on when I walk into my studio in the morning. The empty canvas is there because I had thought of a painting which that canvas is meant for. So I pretend beforehand that I know exactly what it should be, down to all of its characteristics and all of its dimensions - if that doesn't sound too precious.

Does that work then, does it end up that way?

You can never recall that so precisely anymore. For a large part, it does work out that way. I have a drawing, and that drawing is the result of a whole lot of other drawings, these being small sketches, real sketches; I use that sketch as a reminder and guideline for the painting. Often it happens that I have a small drawing, which is sometimes no more than a quick scrawl which nonetheless gives me the idea that the make-up of the parts is so exact and right - and not just in the specific compositional sense of being right - that I transpose this drawing onto the canvas by way of a grid. So the form, as well as the color, are absolutely fixed. But then, alas...

And then you begin to work it out.

And then the trouble begins. The image that you have in your head and the one that you have on paper complement each other. You might say that you're copying something, and that is, in fact, what you do at first. You create the form, you apply color, and then you discover what you actually already knew but what nevertheless is a bitter disappointment each time, that that copying doesn't work; that while painting, something has to happen whereby the painting actually becomes created all over again, comes about. Because of this, it always becomes something different from that which I originally envisaged, but the difference isn't so great that I'd be surprised and say, «did I start with this and end up with that!»

Form and color stay roughly the same.

Yes, you might say that if you can envision a painting entirely beforehand - and I can - and if you make a drawing in which you indicate the construction of the thing you have to create, that then the execution is, for the rest, a matter which shouldn't bring about too many problems. That's something you should be able to do after some time. By then you would know how to do that.

Then you would practically be a classicist. David also knew beforehand, or about 80 percent, what it was to become; and because the drawing had to be transposed into color, that 20 percent had to be figured out while painting.

I don't know what kind of territory I'd be getting into if I were to agree with this. Of course there's a lot of, well not improvisation, no, not improvisation, but orchestration.

Have you had experience with making a painting without preparatory drawing?

No, not with paintings, but I did with some drawings. That is to say, for drawings I also make a sketch beforehand, but I've also made drawings - well, they're hardly drawings but more works on paper - in which I turned everything around so much and worked so frantically that, in any case, it resulted in something which I hadn't envisaged in that way beforehand.

Can you imagine that someone who looks at your work doesn't immediately arrive at the notion that you have such a clear picture in your head when you begin?

Yes, I hope so, too, to a certain extent.

Why?

Because you would otherwise be too conscious of the construction. I don't want that to be visible. That would begin to interfere, it would become disturbing.

Just as a painter who works without a plan doesn't want it to be visible that he works without a plan. If you start on something new, what do the paintings that you've made previously mean then? To what extent do they determine the course or the character of your new paintings?

For a time I tried very consciously, when thinking about a new painting, to create something totally different from the preceding one. I came to the realization, not that this was impossible, but that it wasn't so necessary to uphold this as a principle. In fact I can still only imagine that you make, want to make, a new painting if it's going to be something different from the previous one. As opposed to painters who produce, say, ten paintings and then look at what they've done. But if you're talking about the meaning of the preceding paintings, then you can only conclude that they're of great importance.

In what sense? Can you be more specific?

They indicate a direction in which you are thinking or an area which you recognize as being an area in which you operate. If you deny the previous work, a situation could arise in which you just make a painting different than the one before it; this would become a little schizophrenic. Not that I would want to avoid such a situation to uphold the idea of a development or an oeuvre. As a theoretical possibility, it's probably even a healthy premise from which to work, but the reality is different. A painting is, of course, also the result of circumstances of which you yourself are a part.

Several times you've referred to «thinking about» a new painting. The word think does have very specific connotations though - as if you think something up, as if heart and soul don't have such a large part in it.

But you make... here again you've...

No, I only mean this as a little linguistic exercise. What I would like to know is why you use that word.

Because that's what happens! Why that word and not words like «intuition»... «feeling it coming on»...

There are painters who, as far as they are concerned, work more impulsively and unconsciously. Someone like Soutine would probably never have talked about «thinking» of a painting. The word implies that you take many things into consideration. The painting has to be this and not that and certainly not that... as if you work very rationally.

Of course it isn't rational. Certainly you take all sorts of things into consideration, but if that would be the only thing, then that thinking would of course quickly become a sterile, strategic game.

That's obvious, so why then the preference for the word «think»?

If by thinking you mean: the objectification of that which is unconscious, or the translation of what you want as a painter by means of a concrete action, then yes. When I say «thinking», I mean the «thinking of the way in which a painting has to be made».

It is, in any case, a word which is far from all kinds of Romantic notions as to the making of art. What it implies reminds me of what Degas once said: «Temperament, that's something I know nothing about!»

And so it seemed as if he was saying that he had no temperament.

Exactly, but it was also a reaction against the ideas of painters...

That reaction doesn't play such a role anymore.

But could it be something which you're a little afraid of, painters who work impulsively and irrationally?

No, not at all. Well, okay a painting is not possible without the intervention of action. And action always implies a certain amount of rationality. Not that you can always predict what that action will produce, but you have some idea about it.

Aside from the fact that you can't always predict what an action will produce, you can't always reason why you carry out that action either. You can immediately deal a blow, but you can also postpone the blow and contemplate it.

But you can also ask yourself if the blow is changed by this.

The blow is the same, but the question is whether you deal it or not.

That you deal it is evident. The painting is there to attest to that. From that standpoint, there is little difference between someone who says that he works impulsively and someone who talks about

thinking of a painting. In both cases, a painting is not the ultimate result. You could imagine that you think of it in such a way that the need to make a painting no longer exists. But so far... well, I am a bit more thoughtful, more suspicious than someone who paints from spontaneous impulses and who then supposedly thinks about nothing... but the latter is also of course an unbelievably distorted image. If there's anyone who qualifies as a prototype for this category of painters, and also claims to be that himself, then it would have to be Pollock.

Or more recently, Lüpertz. You did see a film about him on television which irritated you quite a bit.

Yes, then you're talking about method. A chef who knows which ingredients he has to use and what he has to do to produce something good has no guarantee that it will work, but it is probable that it will result in what he wants. Nor is it absolutely improbable that someone ends up with a meal by throwing just about anything together, like a child in the kitchen. That's why I watched that film about Lüpertz with a certain amount of distaste, not because I consider the method to be objectionable or that this would mean that he's an idiot, but actually more because... well, when you work like that and let it be filmed in that way, it's not becoming.

You mean that duality. On the one hand wanting to get completely lost in the schöpferische Unruhe, the creative chaos, and on the other hand knowing that it's all being filmed and that you appear as an actor in your own play.

Yes, I have great difficulty with that.

Regarding the importance of earlier paintings to the later ones, there is a remark made by Mondrian to the effect that destruction is an important factor in the making of art. Does a remark like this say anything to you?

Yes, that's something I can well imagine if you're talking about the making of a work. I can no longer see this with a finished work. It also bears a relationship to formalism and the extent to which you can prevent that by way of concrete actions. If destruction means that you destroy the pattern which threatens to arise, then it certainly has something to do with that. In any case, it has to do with the elimination of things which have been in an earlier stage of implementation but which you have to keep on testing over again for their usability. I think that if you rely on this, on this usability - and I not only think this, I know it from experience then it leads to nothing. As soon as you begin to go in that direction... On the other hand, you can't eliminate it entirely either; you can never pretend that you begin with zero.

A residue of craft and skill always remains present.

A great deal of residue. And that not only relates to the knowledge that you can't thin oil paint with water. It extends to all that you do in the painting and to everything that you fiddle with in your studio. It's a constant swinging back and forth between the automatisms of previously learned things and moments when you - and these aren't fifteen-minute periods which alternate with each other, but split seconds - moments when you discard these automatisms, not because they're objectionable morally or philosophically or in any other sense, but because you can see that they're no longer applicable.

Now something else, a difficult question perhaps for every abstract painter. Are you conscious of somewhat clear sources of inspiration?

You mean other artists?

Not primarily. I mean very immediate sources of inspiration in your daily life. For some this is a lover...

...and for others a crushed soda can. Yes, of course. It seems as though abstract art is something that you cook up in the closed-off world of your own autonomous brain. That is, of course, not true. Nor is it possible. This misconception also says something about that formal aspect of abstract art. It appears to be something which is worked out completely independently, without further reflection, from preconceived notions. And that's not the way it is. I'm extremely aware of external things, very direct sources of inspiration... well, inspiration, I don't know, that sounds as if you sit by the window and...

I consider the term «source of inspiration» to be much more concrete and realistic than vague inspiration.

In a number of paintings I would be able to point to things in which «external stimuli» played a role, and then primarily in conceiving the painting, possibly while painting, but still, for the most part, while thinking about it and making the working sketch.

Is this on an optical level, or can it also be literature or music?

On an optical level, yes. This can also be film. It doesn't have so much to do with how you abstract things from reality or translate them into your own form, but more with the way you look at things, how you experience your surroundings.

You see something, and then?

If you look at the color of your pants and there's a pack of Marlboros on them, I'm just saying anything, then... well, in many cases it's not so much the things from reality, but the properties of the things which you experience in reality. And in my case, that more often involves color than it does form. A form which is not related to something does not exist... I mean, an abstract form. With color, it's different. The color of that pack of Marlboros is only related to that color itself and not to the pack. Color has the abstract property of being able to be seen separately from an object.

Let's talk a little more about form, because color in a painting nevertheless has to be activated by form. If I look at your work from a nearly twenty-year period, then I observe a striking change in the figure-background relationships. In both the earlier work and the later work, there is a much more pronounced distinction between figure and background, a much clearer articulation of form and counterform. In the paintings from the late 1970's, the figure and background are woven together in a manner which is visually very complex. Can you explain this development, not as a psychologist but as a painter?

Looking back, you can comment on it very simply by saying that in the beginning, in the paintings

between 1970 and 1978 or so, I had a strong need to be bright and clear, strict and radical, insofar as I was able to deal with that. This certainly also had something to do with the climate in the art of that time. But that only applies to the paintings, not to the drawings. In my drawings from that time, I've always had the impression, in retrospect, that more happened, that I could do more with them than I could with the paintings, not just technically, and that in that interim period where the paintings are put together more intricately, I was doing something which I had already done in the drawings.

Aren't you referring here to independent drawings as opposed to sketches?

Yes. There aren't so many of them, but those drawings were more ambiguous than the paintings, insofar as you can compare paintings with drawings; in the drawing, there's always the white sheet of paper which makes it impossible for the articulation to be as complex as it can be in a painting. So okay, I allowed the complexity of those drawings to emerge in the paintings from what we can simply call that middle period. The fact that I'm now retreating from that, or not retreating from, but that my work is now again more severe in its construction, apparently less improvised...

But those more complex paintings weren't improvised either? I've always seen a great strictness of implementation and execution in them.

Not in all of them. There are a number of paintings from that time which I still think are good; those are the least worked out, the least complex, although the complex ones, that's true, are tightly controlled; but that tight control leads, in some paintings, to images which appear to have come about improvisationally, in all of their details, in all of their stratification and articulations. After a while I became tired to death of this. There was such a deliberateness to the expression and the character of the image that, looking back, it seems a little... well, actually I don't understand anymore why I did that then. I now work with the same amount of carefulness, but the form is simplified and no longer built from so many different properties. And here I can exercise the same tight control without it becoming precious or fussy, and without getting the feeling that you... I'm no less occupied with making the detail and the expression more precise, but I do have the feeling now that I'm using a form within which I can do that without this being noticeable.

What do you mean by noticeable?

In some of the paintings from that time, there is something which starts to really irritate me. This particularly has to do with the formats. The format was also consciously changed. The paintings from that time were predominantly narrow and high, and because of this, everything takes place on a relatively small surface; thus the articulation of figure and background keeps interfering further into that small surface. It isn't as if I undertook or experienced the figure-background relationship as a specific problem and that I tried to find an increasingly complex assemblage of forms for those two components of the painting, but in retrospect you can indeed say that this is observable.

The change in format, can you say something more about that?

It wasn't as though I felt the necessity to suddenly start using a completely different format in order to solve a specific problem. There was no particular point at which I said: now it has to be different. It's a multiple of factors which bring that about. Very simple things, for instance, which have to do

with the place where you work; a banal and insignificant factor perhaps but nonetheless one which has played a certain role. I did know that the narrow format was uncommon, but at that point I never felt it to be something peculiar. It was, in fact, an attempt to utilize an uncommon shape without having this become peculiar. So anyway, when you've made a number of them, then it does begin to be an element which becomes increasingly distinct from the whole. And that bothers me. So long as I could do something with it, there was no reason to give it up. But evidently it did come to that point.

You started to recognize your own solution?

Exactly. The reason which I had then given for the use of that narrow, high format was that it avoids associations with a landscape-like arrangement. Now I don't see that anymore as something which I absolutely have to avoid.

But at the time you evidently did.

I've never considered associations to be something detrimental in any of the paintings that I've made. I didn't consciously try to make things which would evoke particular associations, nor did I ever regard the emergence of associations as something objectionable. Only when an association becomes an obstructive incidental circumstance do I try to avoid it, and at that point it's something about which I no longer can say: I'll allow it, it doesn't bother me. It bothers me when it interferes with being able to see the painting. And that varies, of course, from viewer to viewer. Sometimes you notice from the reaction of a viewer that a painting can only be seen in one way, say for instance as *Flying bird* or whatever. And when that wasn't your intention and when you notice that this reaction occurs with more than one totally blind viewer, then I would seriously consider this to be a hindrance. The painting would be destroyed if that was the only way in which you could look at it.

You were just talking about color. It seems to me that a substantial problem for an abstract painter would be the choice of color. A figurative painter has a reference point in reality for this choice, even if he deviates from reality. How can the choice of color in an abstract painting be more than arbitrary? How do you work with it and how do you give color logic and naturalness, so that the viewer doesn't say, «that yellow and green could just as well have been blue and red»?

The choice is arbitrary in the context of color such as it appears in reality. It would also be arbitrary if it indeed just wouldn't matter which color you'd choose. That's not the way it is. You don't choose one color, you choose a combination of colors, a coherence. You were just asking about sources of inspiration and external impressions. A painter can use forms which he encounters in reality via a process of abstraction. That doesn't happen to me so often, but it does happen to me that a color, and even more a color combination, activates a considerable number of things in the contemplation of a painting which you already have envisaged somewhat in your mind.

That sounds mysterious: a color combination which sets something in motion.

You would then suspect that meanings lie hidden in this...

If you do a study, then you do this with line. Perhaps you indicate something about the color, but

you can't do a study with color alone. Is there then a hierarchy between form and color?

I was just wondering about that. I notice that if I come across or see or think of a color combination, frequently in an coincidental way, then the idea for a painting takes shape. Then it seems as though all of that is determined by the color. But a requirement for encountering that color is the form, the construction which you use. And the construction, this acquires its meaning in the painting through the color. These two things are interdependent. The necessity of a particular painting, and thus of the color as well, doesn't depend so much upon the knowledge as it does upon the conviction that what you're doing is not arbitrary.

Form you have to create, color you can choose. In the application of paint there is also the factor of creation, but color is there nevertheless. You can go to a store to buy a tube of paint. Paint is still nothing but amorphous, colored substance.

Then, in a painting in which color appears, form is something through which potential color is realized. But the question was: how do you choose color? And this isn't how we arrive at an answer, if any answer is possible. I can only go back to what I said earlier: you don't choose one color, but a coherence, a combination. The changes which occur in your original idea about it also pertain to this combination. You begin with a very simple choice. In your contemplation of it and in your preparations for the painting, this choice becomes increasingly specific by way of the considerations which you make with regard to that combination.

Sometimes the choice also has to do with the previous painting. If certain colors don't appear in it, you can try, let's say, to make a red-green or yellow-blue painting. Then it's about the type of yellow or the type of blue. The type becomes more precise as the combination of these two main colors - in my case it's usually two main colors - becomes more active in your mind and becomes more of a dynamic entity. Naturally you don't really see that until you're doing it, when you get to know the painting better and know more exactly where it's headed. Therefore the choice is somewhat abstract at first. You don't start out at random, but very simply, with a yellow or blue which is on hand. You use this color, then, for the underpainting. This provides a fairly flat, one-dimensional color, more an indication of color. Frequently it happens that, if the predominant form is blue for instance and the background yellow, I switch this relationship around a few times, thus going from positive to negative and back. The color slowly changes then from one of not-random-but-general blue or yellow into a color which starts to take after the character of the painting. Dependent upon all kinds of factors like the surface structure, the extent to which you dilute the paint, the underlying color and the behavior of the surrounding color, that first color becomes increasingly active, and less of a color surface or area of color which... All I can really say about it is that you begin fairly generally and that the more your idea as to the character of the painting becomes clear, the more the color becomes specific and individual.

You usually use two main colors. What is the reason for this?

If you go back to the drawing, then you see a dominant form and a background. This is how you get that dichotomy in the color. It's difficult to determine beforehand whether it's necessary, in order to achieve a more dynamic relationship, to give some parts of the form a different nuance, a different intensity of color or even a different underlying structure. But in the beginning - and hence this choice of two colors - there is a simple relationship of form and background. If more colors emerge in this, which has been occurring more frequently lately, then those are decisions which I make after

I've already started on the painting. Those decisions fundamentally cohere with the original idea. Big changes will never occur. But it's quite uncertain as to whether you'll decide, halfway down the road, to use strontium yellow, for instance - if this color out of a tube with this specific form, with this specific structure and these underlayers which will also do what you had hoped they'd do - because this color, which you've seen on your color chart, comes closer to the climate which is going to emerge in the painting.

Aside from the choice of color, what do you consider the most problematic aspect of the use of color?

That varies. My greatest difficulty at this point is in getting a certain blue - a dark, layered blue - to retain its color. That dark blue has the tendency to become black. Ultramarine is particularly problematic. When you see this color, a half transparent color, in the tube, it's a very deep blue. On a white underground, this blue becomes loud and purplish. Used thinly, you do retain the color, but then it's too transparent. If you thicken the painted surface by applying more layers on top of each other, then the blue gradually disappears from it; then the color becomes blacker and blacker, and it gradually begins to cave in. This also has to do with the thinning agents. If the medium shines, then the color is lost due to the light; it's as if a mirror has been put on top of it, and the color seems to disappear behind this. If you make the surface matte, the color becomes very dead; it then loses its intensity. So this is an endless... Moreover, if you work on a large scale, light is an especially troublesome factor. Sometimes you have areas in which the color is exactly the same, areas which work well when observed from a certain angle, and others which completely disappear or seem to slam shut. You can't leave it this way. Light is a requirement, but under normal circumstances, the color has to be everything that it has to be, everywhere.

You often work for quite a long time on a painting. Recently I heard you say that you had completely scrapped down parts of a certain painting fifteen times. How does this duration of work relate to the clear - cut idea with which you begin?

You could say that this is a lack of technique. Partly, this is technique, but technique is something so elusive and has so much to do with the painting on which you're working and for which you have to find solutions which that particular painting needs. If you can make a representation beforehand of what a painting must be - and I do have that representation exactly - then, naturally, for the rest it's not just a matter of carrying this out. The painting comes into existence in the making of it; and with me, this is very much so, perhaps to an excessive degree. A painting cannot fail in the process of being made, because it is through this very process that it must be created. So if you work long enough and are tenacious enough, then at a certain point this has to result in a painting which you have in mind. You set a painting in motion, and the direction which you give it, that stays, that doesn't change, but in the process of being made a painting will go more and more its own inevitable way, and that you follow also.

Do you use a definite method in making a painting?

No.

I mean, do you work methodically?

Yes and no. I do work methodically, but there is no method in the sense of exhausting a general technique in order to make a painting. I have to invent the technique, I have to discover this for a particular painting. But that discovery takes place in a fairly methodical manner. I know beforehand how I have to start on something, what I have to do and what preparations I have to make for it. Frequently most of the work lies in the making of preparations. And by preparations I then mean very simple things such as the taping off of a shape, or covering parts of the painting with plastic - whatever - so that no splashes will get on it.

You say that you have to invent the technique for a particular painting. Can you explain what you mean by technique?

There are very simple things that you have to know. And I'm talking about really very general technical things which apply to everyone, for example that you shouldn't put a new layer of paint on top of one which is drying. But technique only becomes my technique when... well, okay, I don't have this technique written down on paper, so it's not something from which I can draw. Technique is what you do to make the painting, which you have in your mind, visible. That's not something which is separate - and in this sense, it isn't general either - from the painting which you are making at that moment. Technique also varies from painting to painting.

Aside from the differences among the paintings themselves, are there changes in the technique when viewed in the context of a larger period of time?

The technique changes because your ideas... well, okay, ideas, because your intentions with a painting change. In the paintings from fifteen or twenty years ago, I used quite a lot of acrylic. Later I started to make more demands on color. Not that I began to regard color as something which I had to attack as an isolated problem, but it did begin to play an ever important role. The demands which I make on the behavior of color cause me to use almost no acrylic anymore, only oil paint. That may seem to be a superficial difference between two types of paint, but it is, in fact, something which has a substantial effect on the way in which you make a painting.

The Frenchman Alain once wrote that every technique has the innate tendency to obliterate the very idea for which the technique was developed. Differently stated: in every technique there lies the danger of self-sufficiency and of mechanical, soulless repetition.

Awareness of that danger or that tendency of the means to become the end is continually present. Of course it isn't that you're solely occupied with preventing this, or that a painting derives its right to exist from the fact that you were able to prevent this. But there are all sorts of things which, in themselves, are fairly concrete - and which are also part of your equipment as a painter - which can help you to avoid this or prevent it. In the most crude and banal manner, this is the avoidance of the most commonly shared ideas about composition, color, etc., of habits and things that are obvious which exist partly in your own work and partly, of course, in a greater whole as well. The mere questioning of the technique already encompasses the idea of a painting, and vice versa. You can't look at these two things separately. You partly succeed in preventing technical habits, and because of this a development comes about; but as far as the technique is concerned, you can never of course begin absolutely at zero - even though that might be ideal.

That connects with what we first talked about - the «how», the «what», and the «why». The reason

for making something is constantly besieged by the technique which is associated with the «how».

A painter, because he is a painter, an artist, evidently has the obligation to remain one until his death. I think this is an idiotic idea. The greatest enemy of a painter is the thought that he constantly has to be creating something. What he creates, of course, rests largely upon the things he's already created. The problem of formalism and the technique which obliterates the idea is firmly attached to the idea of an oeuvre. A painter who feels obligated to establish an oeuvre... an enormous risk is connected with this. This is also one of the things which I find so irritating about the idea of painting as a «metier». On that point I'm somewhat sceptical, because that would imply that a painter is obliged to, well, not repeat something but to perpetuate it, also when the reason for it isn't at all present anymore. I think that there's a lot wrong with the idea of producing an oeuvre. Much of what is now happening in the art world - exhibiting, repetitious exhibiting, exhibiting everywhere - has to do with this fixation on the idea of an oeuvre.

If technique is all that you need to realize a painting, can you also say that technique and style are one and the same, or nearly so?

If you take style to mean a particular coherence in the manifestation of a painting, or if style is defined by characteristics which the paintings have in common, and if that also has to do with your intentions and with the similarities in the way in which you worked on those paintings, then those are things which are heavily intertwined.

So, conversely, changes in style cannot appear without changes in technique.

No. But when you think about the next painting, you don't think about style. At first you might say very simply «That new painting is not so much something which has to be different from the one before, but it's something for which I have to think of contrasts or, rather, different solutions to a number of things which I undertook in the previous painting in order to set the thinking about that new painting in motion». If there is still mention of a change in style, then that's primarily something which has to do with the direction that you give to the intentions, the ideas which you have about it, and the method of making which it has as a result. If you look at it like this, that could also result in a change in style... But changing style which sounds as though you say, «I've painted violently for some time now, why don't I work more quietly for a while?» Those kinds of conscious changes in the outer form, that's not where it begins of course, but it can indeed be a result.

...

(In *Toon Verhoef*, Amsterdam Art Foundation, Amsterdam 1988).