

2.7.2022-27.11.2022

Joris Ghekiere (1955-2016) gained fame and appreciation as a painter. With his thorough study of and experimentation with the possibilities of the medium, he acquired a unique position in the art of painting.

What is barely known, however, is that Joris Ghekiere also left an extraordinarily rich body of work on paper. From the early 1980s till shortly before his death, the artist carefully preserved hundreds of sketches, collages, drawings and watercolours in a chest of drawers in his studio. More than 600 works, in various formats, produced with a variety of techniques and created over a period of more than 35 years. Together they form a surprising oeuvre that runs almost parallel to his well-known paintings.

Apart from a few drawings, Joris Ghekiere has never shown this collection publicly. He did not show it to the many curators, critics and artist friends who regularly visited him in his studio, and certainly not to the general public.

With the exception of a few close friends, the chest of drawers and this aspect of Ghekiere's artistic practice remained a well-kept secret for a long time.

Since there were countless designs lying around in the studio, torn or soiled with footprints or ink spots, we can be sure that this selection was extremely valuable to the artist.

'Journey on paper' examines the years 1990-1991 in which Joris Ghekiere spent a year traveling through Asia. No fewer than 170 autonomous works of art were created during this months-long journey. Mu.ZEE is the first museum to display a large selection of this collection of works on paper.

A cupboard, a chest of drawers, a drawer: repository of memories

A cupboard, a chest of drawers or just a drawer - these are three objects that turn up regularly in Joris Ghekiere's work. They appear as rather surreal or mysterious elements in the middle of a marsh, a colonnade or on a Japanese travel drawing. Next to a small drawer on one of his drawings, the artist wrote: *"Event. Imagining. Intimate relationship between repositories and hiding places. The reality cannot be grasped. It is interwoven with emotions, thinking, you can only evoke them, touch a nerve, touch on the reality, show the repositories*

where the mind piles up its emotions. Images emerge, take shape, images from the imagination which cannot immediately be localised."

Joris Ghekiere's chest of drawers is a repository of memories, a personal archive consisting of experiments carried out in the studio, on the one hand, and from works created during his travels on the other. It gives us an exceptional insight into the artist's creative process. This collection of works on paper brings us closer to Joris Ghekiere the artist than his paintings on canvas, in which, as he put it so nicely himself, he created little branding for the viewer.

His own studio versus a mobile studio

The works on paper can be divided into two categories.

In the first group, works made in the familiar setting of the artist's own studio, we find, among other things, sketches after old masters, some style exercises and many landscapes. Most striking, however, are the many collages, drawings and experiments, which can often be directly linked to a specific work of art or a thematic series. These works show similarities with the evolution, variation and layering that recur in Joris Ghekiere's paintings, and therefore provide an insight into the creation process that preceded his works on canvas.

In his preliminary studies we see how the artist departs from certain almost banal images and how he works on them by cutting, pasting and using unusual colours, or painting threatening shadows, in order to arrive at a design or starting point for a painting. Experimentation as a preliminary study for a work or a series is a practice we find many artists employ. The resulting creations not only have an artistic, but also an unmistakable documentary value.

A second category consists of works Joris Ghekiere made while travelling. Even as a young man, the artist was a passionate traveller. Just after he finished his studies, he went to Spain for a few months, followed by numerous trips to Turkey, Italy, Japan, the Philippines, China, Russia and India. During his travels, Joris Ghekiere put his thoughts, impressions and reflections on paper, in words and especially in pictures. The sketchbooks and diaries, watercolours and drawings are therefore fascinating pictorial accounts of his travels. These works, which were not made in the intimacy of his own studio, but in environments and contexts that were so important to Joris Ghekiere, tell of his incredible love of travelling and the unknown, and his fascination with the vastness of nature.

In 1988 already, Joris Ghekiere described himself as 'a desert wanderer with sand in his eyes'. It is an image that the artist would carry with him for the rest of his life and that is applicable to his approach both to travelling and to painting: *"My orientation is good, I am a chess player and want to keep an overview and control, yet as an ardent traveller I find lack of orientation much more interesting. Going curiously into strange and unknown territory."*

The year 1990: one year of travels on paper

Among his many trips, a long journey through Asia stands out. On 1 August 1990 Joris Ghekiere set off, with his beloved Inge Henneman, for Asia. There they travelled together through the Philippines, China, Pakistan, India, Japan and Thailand. A year later, in 1991, they returned to Belgium.

During this months-long trip Ghekiere made at least 170 autonomous works, as well as countless sketches, designs, collages and sketchbooks, sent or brought back with him and carefully preserved. The many impressions from his travels form the core of this book. They

show a clear break in style with the mainly dark works that he made as a young man in the 1980s. We can also see the genesis of motifs and patterns which, abstracted or otherwise, return in Ghekiere's later painting oeuvre. Contrasting colours, surface division, the use of text, as well as motifs like the circle, the funnel, the telescope and perspective lines make their appearance in Ghekiere's work during this trip.

Joris Ghekiere painted and drew in nature, rented studios, turned hotel rooms into studios and even studied with a renowned miniaturist in Jaipur (India).

The impact of the overpowering landscapes on the artist is very noticeable in his creations. We also see an enormous fascination with the form language used by other cultures in their architecture, religion, philosophy and even political propaganda. In China, for example, Joris Ghekiere made a series of paintings on posters of Mao Zedong, in Pakistan he was inspired by the old Baltit Fort in the Hunza Valley, and in Jaipur he became intrigued by a miniature depicting the story of Krishna subduing the water snake Kaliya.

Joris Ghekiere processed these and many other impressions into pictures that bear witness to a very formal interest in certain symbols, customs and aesthetics from other cultures. The content and meaning were interesting to the artist, but rather incidental to the achievement of a strong pictorial image.

*"1 year's travels on paper drawings and paintings china india japan
Walking freely my shadow before me
Hotel rooms. The beach and ... were my studio"*

This was how Joris Ghekiere and Inge Henneman announced the exhibition that they organised in the artist's studio in the autumn of 1991. It is still one of the rare moments that Joris Ghekiere showed his works on paper to the public. Some 30 years later, a broad selection of Ghekiere's travel drawings, 130 from the 170, have been collected in the exhibition at Mu.ZEE. The images have lost nothing of their pictorial power and show a ***magnificent travel story by a young artist, a desert wanderer with sand in his eyes.***

Contact pers

Colette Castermans – colette.castermans@muzee.be

32 (0)473 53 38 15 – 32 (0)59 56 45 89

Info and images via <https://www.muzee.be>

Username : pers

pass word : romestraat