

SPECIAL INTERVIEW WITH
Piet Van Den Boog

— THE ALCHEMIST —

"Alchemy is a kind of philosophy:
a kind of thinking that leads to a way
of understanding."
- Marcel Duchamp



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Dutch painter, Piet Van Den Boog (b.1951) currently lives and works in Amsterdam. His work is included in many important international museums and collections, has found a new interpretation of the figure and portrait by way of an alchemic process that promotes effects of chemistry on the picture plane. Influenced by the writings of Sylvia Plath and painters like Jenny Saville, van den Boog's point of departure is a photo reference, which he then enlarges to a monumental size. Oil and acrylic paint make up flesh tones and facial details, while abstract strokes in rust tones are

chemically etched into the cold lead surfaces, becoming a powerful metaphor for the internal scars we all possess. For his first solo show in Israel, van den Boog pushes the limits of portraiture by directly confronting emotion head-on by way of large-scale paintings. New ways of seeing, generated through a personal process, have always rewarded the viewer with new insights. A modern day alchemist, van den Boog's experiments with base metals like lead, copper, steel etc. form a grand visual allegory of personal transmutation and the quest for a cure for the human soul.



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It is the process that ultimately imbues the portraits with relatable human qualities. The element of technical surrender alludes to the unforeseen consequences of intimacy and the perpetual co-existence of pain and pleasure.

Van den Boog's work is exciting and emotionally rich in that as viewers we participate in his process and feel transformed by it. He benefits from the uncontrollable nature of chemical action by way of accidents, which bring chaos to the organized mind.

We were lucky to have a close interview with this magnificent artist.

Hello Piet, It's such an honor, thank you for the interview. Please introduce yourself to our readers;

My name is Piet van den Boog.

I live and work in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

The beautiful studio where I am working is located in a historical building of a former ship's company, overlooking the IJ-waters of the old harbor of Amsterdam.

I am 64 years old and I am in a relationship.

What's your background in art?

My background in art is the studio at



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the Art Academy Gerrit Rietveld in Amsterdam, from where I graduated in 1979. My first solo exhibition was in 1984.

I also have studied at the Technical University in Delft, where I graduated in 1976.

In these days you exhibit your work in Tel Aviv, Israel, a solo exhibition named the "The Alchemist", Where did the name come from?

The name "The Alchemist" comes from the fact that I incorporate chemical techniques in my paintings to create vibrant colors and textures.

The surface on which the paintings are made are sheets of lead. Just like the old alchemists who tried to convert lead into gold, the lead has been the starting point of my paintings.

As Marcel Duchamp said "Alchemy is a kind of philosophy: a kind of thinking that leads to a way of understanding."

What is Your Impression from TLV City?

Although I was only able to spend a few days in Tel Aviv, staying in the center of the White City, I did experience the vibrance of a city with many young people. The same vibrant feeling I had during my stay for the exhibitions I had in Chelsea, New York City.

What can you tell us about the special technique you use?

As I said the surface I make my paintings on are sheets of lead (glued on wood panel). The material allows me to combine classic painting techniques with acrylic and oil with chemical processes. The chemical processes always start with patination of the lead surface. Plates of copper and steel are used in combination with different chemicals to create the vibrant colors. These colors are deposited on the lead surface that remain after the plates are removed. They range from intense orange, yellow



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iron oxide to green and blue patinas and to the vibrant color of Azurite and malachite. (Malachite is a color mined already in ancient times).

What's integral to the work of an artist?

That is a difficult question and this can be different for different artists.

For me it is the passion of creating works which both intrigue, evoke an emotion. Color also plays a large role in the paintings.

What has been a seminal experience for you?

As a child, I experienced that I loved to draw and create.

Explain what you do in 100 words

What I do is making paintings in which

I embed my emotions, my love for harmony and at the same time, let the viewer be intrigued, allowed to fill its own story.

The alchemy part of my work blows me to combine abstract elements of the chemical processes with the figurative painting of acrylic and oil.

The fact that the chemical processes can't be controlled and have a great element of change is what I am looking for in my work.

It brings chaos to the organized mind. From this chaos comes inspiration.

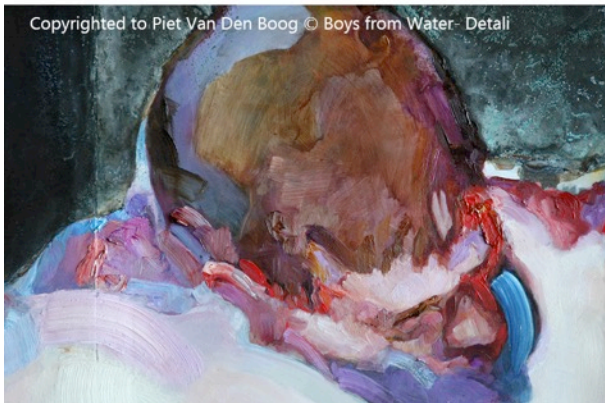
How has your practice change over time?

After graduating at the art academy the focus was on watercolors and oil painting on canvas. In this first period architectural elements were predominant.





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This gradually changed into figurative paintings and later also in portraits. The past ten years I started to experiment with surfaces of raw steel plates and sheets of lead, using chemicals and other metals to create the colors.

What art do you most identify with?

The most obvious parallel can be drawn to the work of Anselm Kiefer, who uses sheets of lead and chemical processes in many of his works. Although for him the material of lead itself is the focus point.

Works of Francis Bacon are for me always a great inspiration to me. A beautiful exhibition of his large scale triptychs in the Foundation Maeght left me stunned.

What is your artistic outlook on life?

Curiosity and the ability to be amazed about things and looking for something new, is something I hope I can keep for the rest of my life. I think this is the fundamental element of creativity

What is your dream project?

To make a series of works for a specific location. For example, in one of the old

palaces in Venice.

Name three artists you'd like to be compared to.

Already two I have mentioned, Anselm Kiefer and Francis Bacon. Although I do not consider myself to be on the same level as them.

Another artist I do admire is Anish Kapoor for his unconventional thinking.

Favorite or most inspirational place (in the world)?

My home city Amsterdam as well as New York City is my favorite and inspirational places of the world, both for different reasons.

What's the best piece of advice you've been given?

To do what I believe in and not what people want from me.

Professionally, what's your goal?

To continue to evolve in my work and continue to find innovative ways to add to my work.

To be presented in both private collections as well as museum collections.

What wouldn't you do without?

Energie to keep on doing what I love most.

Many thanks Piet, for this fascinating interview, we wish you luck and success and more happiness in your way.



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Z **Zemack**
Contemporary
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PIET VAN DEN BOOG | THE ALCHEMIST

Curator: Yaron Haramati
Zemack contemporary art







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