

The Living Image

Henriette Dingemans, 1961 and Sjoerd Bras 1952, working together under the name The Living Image, have emerged as among the most innovative surveyors of figuration in contemporary painting.

A Living Image painting begins with a photograph, either one taken by the artist or an image found in the mass media. Using a computer, they might crop, stretch, or skew, or tweak the colours of the picture, or leave it almost untouched, before making an inkjet print that they use as the direct source material for the final painting. To create the three-canvas work *City of Wonders* for the Art-Acquire exhibition in Dubai, 'Dutch Art and Culture', they took a series of photographs, all at high exposure, of tropical landscapes containing lilies and palm trees that they came across on their travels. They then adjusted the sense of space and levels of brightness, altering the hue and tone to give them an even, almost saturated light. Behind the lush lemon trees and flowering calyx, the Dubai skyline dominates the horizon, a motif that serves both to balance the canvases and highlight the subtle differences between the natural world and the man-made.

The Living Image sees this space, spread out on a canvas measuring 5.5 metres by 2.4 metres, as existing between nature and civilisation. The paintings revel in this in-between state, putting into play a set of oppositions that animate the work: abstraction and figuration, surface and depth, artificiality and authenticity.

Their recent work for the Child Protection Society in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, displays art of an almost paradisiacal character with words such as LOVE and CARE on foil-masked windows; and wallpaper with meticulously stitched photos of hopping, skipping children.

The Living Image likes to create atmosphere through colour, using flowers and landscapes from differing worlds, recognisable to people from cultures other than their own, to discover an imaginary idealised landscape. But despite their illusory nature, the paintings have a forceful presence and few contemporary artists bring such intelligence and energy to an investigation into how we perceive images.

Trained at the Royal Academy of Fine Art in The Hague, specialising in Monumental Art, Henriette Dingemans took a postgraduate course in Sceneography. She has travelled extensively, using her camera to document people and places. Place and face are of key importance to her, voyaging and movement being ways to approach the universal aspects of a place and its people. Sjoerd Bras also trained at the Royal Academy of Fine Art in The Hague. During this period his work was figurative and realistic. Examples of this are his illustrations of birds for the Art Supplement of *Avicultura* magazine. He also studied the paint techniques of the Old Masters and, though the figurative aspect of his work still plays an important part, the introduction of digital techniques has given him more freedom and his work a new dimension.

