

## Reflections on the Modern (Landscape)

In course of the re-evaluation of the art of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a strong tendency has emerged in modern art criticism to evaluate art in rather formalistic terms. One indicator of this trend is the title given to the Kandinsky exhibition currently running at the Tate Modern in London, *Kandinsky: The Path to Abstraction*. The implication made is that the artist treads a path of purely visual and formal abstraction. Yet this approach is in itself, a kind of abstraction, divorcing the artist from all non-technical and non-formal preoccupations that are often the driving forces behind the need for artistic expression.

The work of Kris Van Dessel could provoke a similar debate. This only serves to reinforce the stimulating and inspiring ambiguity of his work; and the multiple ways it can be approached.

Issues of density, development, (sub)urban sprawl, exaggeration and consumption are revisited, explored and manipulated, giving us a view into a version of our present and at the same time carrying notions of association, memory, content and desire. These pleasures are intrinsic to art forms and make up much of the interest in modern life in the city, and the memory of a lost pastoral landscape. The imagery of his work transforms global placelessness into space-making; and transforms the traditional representation of a landscape, into a kind of text, one that inevitably speaks of the culture and the natural force that made it.

The difficulties of representation and representability are major issues in the context of culture and modern life. Whilst there is a universal awareness that we are caught within increasingly complex global networks (since we are increasingly affected by the intrusion of corporate space everywhere in our daily lives), we often have no way of visualizing these entities, of modelling them in our mind's eye. However, Kris Van Dessel manages to achieve this with his landscapes of the mind; through subtle mixes of the figurative and the abstract that echo the linear qualities and perspectives of our manmade environment.

Kris Van Dessel has developed some instantly recognizable motifs; the frequent repetition of points, lines, angles, surfaces and solids that evoke the image of some sort of infrastructure or

network. Typically for networks, the internal regulations of the parts are decisive, whereas the overall shape and extent remains highly fluid. The same could be said of the way Kris freezes an image in a specific drawing, whilst his preferred manmade objects (roads, buildings, neon lights) and movements (cuts, displacements, grid shifts, shears, inversion, rotation and folds) reoccur in different, often unexpected guises. He shifts the conditions and debates to provoke poetry with his tactical improvisations and displays.