

## Klaas Vanhee

Mechelen, Belgium, 1982

### ***The way you pronounce my name***

by Oscar van den Boogaard

When, a few years ago, the artist told me that his exhibition would be about the place where he grew up, and the friendship he had with W., the boy who lived next-door to him, and the things they'd do together, I was reminded of a passage of *Wieviel Wahrheit braucht der Mensch* (How much truth do we need?) by German philosopher Rüdiger Safranski, which roughly translates as: 'Man has always envied animals because they are at one with nature, without an intrusive awareness. Man has always envied God, because he is all spirit, with no nature to encumber it. And man has, finally, envied the child, that divine animal. Thereby man envied himself, because of his lost childhood years, with all their spontaneity and directness. Our memory leads us to believe we all experienced the expulsion from paradise already, at the end of our childhood years.'

The artist told me, that during his youth, it was the custom among his friends to give one another nicknames, playful adulterations of true names. But for W. there was no nickname, he simply stayed who he was, strong and vulnerable: W. The artist and W. would spend time with each other, that is what they did. They would be together during almost all of their time outside of school and outside the house. *'If acting and thinking would organise a race, thinking wouldn't win,'* says the artist. They'd act without a plan, and without pausing to reflect. The friendship between the artist and W. was made from time and space in their purest forms.

They would do what boys do: follow each other on the bicycle, perform bicycle tricks, repair bicycles, light fires maybe, climb trees, onto walls, up poles, onto the roof of W.'s garage. If there was anything they wanted, they'd make it themselves.

This is the boyish freedom the artist seeks out in his work. And this is what W. stands for. The artist as a divine being: no intrusive awareness; spirit and nature rolled in one. It is from this tempestuous freedom that the objects, assemblages and drawings in this exhibition were forged.

'W. was always good,' the artist said, 'we'd also practice waltzing, slowing and *hakken*. It's something you don't hear about these days any more. In English, I think they refer to it as gabbering. We'd start a lot together, but he'd usually end it sooner.'

W. stopped doing it, but the artist continued doing it by himself, and in this way, he has turned it into his working method: he has dedicated his work to the search for this spirit of being and making.

It is the search for true freedom, acting without thinking, in which everything is possible and permitted, as long as it is truly free, in as exact a way as possible.

A childhood friend has the advantage of forever being a childhood friend, even if you don't see him anymore. He is there, safely preserved under the bell jar of the past. But the artist doesn't want to merely look; he wants to feel, so he smashes the bell jar to pieces. For him, making art is a shamanic act, in which time and space are released and W. comes to life, but not only him.

'The strange thing is I no longer remember what W. used to call me...' the artist said. The search for W. is thereby also a search for something that has to do with the artist's own self, a very vulnerable, un-self-evident *I*, just as un-self-evident as W. is, but as visible as the pointing finger, the pink towel, the remote control, the pigeon, the cherries, the rolls of tape, the lead gun, the pornographic drawing, Tintin's men on the moon, the lamp and the BMX, which is in fact a reconstruction of a found bicycle he'd use to hang onto W.'s motorcycle as they'd go out to buy weed; it was very unstable because of those wide handle bars.

'The discovery that, when you go over a ramp and take off into the air, you don't just have to wait in fear to land on the ground again, but that - for a moment - you are free, for example, to adjust the bicycle between your legs, move it a bit higher, or to move to the left or right.' This is the artist. This is Klaas Vanhee.

## Klaas Vanhee

Live and work in Gante, Belgium

Klaas Vanhee (1982, Mechelen, Belgium) currently lives and works in Ghent. A graduate of the city's LUCA school of arts in the painting department. In January 2016 he completed the two years postgraduate residency programme at HISK – Higher Institute for Fine Arts, Ghent. Over the past years he has exhibited at 6th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, PHOEBUS Gallery, Rotterdam, De Garage, Mechelen, Objectif Exhibitions, Antwerp, Galeria silvestre, Madrid, Z33, Hasselt, Musée Royal de l'Armée, Brussels, Rodolphe Janssen Gallery, Brussels, NICC, Antwerp and S.M.A.K. in Ghent. He had residency's in Leipzig and WorkspaceBrussels, and contributed to international art fairs such as Drawing Room Lisboa, Estampa, Madrid and Drawing Now, Paris.