SKETCHES

by

Willem Krijgsman

More than
280 illustrations

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BY
WILLEM KRIJGSMAN

Cover: untitled, 2000, colour pencil on paper
photo: Willem Krijgsman

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Layout & Cover: Books on Demand
Publisher: BoD · Books on Demand, Mannerheimintie 12 B,
00100 Helsinki, bod@bod.fi
Print: Libri Plureos GmbH, Friedensallee 273,
22763 Hampuri, Saksa
ISBN: 978-952-80-8704-5

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SKETCHES IN SANGUINE, INDIAN RED AND OTHER COLOURS

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INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW

Interview with Visual Artist Willem Krijgsman in Riihimäki, Finland.

Why do you call your pictures sketches, why not drawings?

Well, drawings tend to be more ready-made artworks, while sketches are looser and freer in approach. They stay in an unreadiness state. You can compare this with a recorded demo in music or a rehearsal in theatre. In my new book you can find mainly sketches, but there are also worked-out sketches, you might call drawings.

When did you decide to make a book about your sketches?

Already in 2023, when I became 70, I marked the occasion by publishing in Finnish an art book, called *Fifty-Fifty*, about my integration process into the Finnish society. I'd illustrated the book with my colour pencil paintings, intertextual collages. I had painted them between 1999 and 2022. In these collages I borrowed parts from Finnish paintings belonging to the so-called Golden Age of Finnish Art and connected them with borrowed parts from paintings of the Dutch Golden Age, and paintings from art history in general.
The publishing of my first art book made me aware of the plenty of art I had made during the years. I thought, now, that I am 70, it's also a good reason to look back and go through my artworks and see, what I can do with them. I had made different art forms from the beginning of the eighties till now: assemblages, paper collages, junk art, oil paintings, watercolours, drawings, colour pencil paintings and clay sculptures. Well, looking back, it resulted in a second art book, published in 2024, called *The Play of Emotion and Fantasy*. It's introducing my earlier artworks until 2015, including paper collages, assemblages, junk art, clay sculpture and drawings.
So, the idea to create an art book isn't new. It's interesting to look back on your own arts, to read your own art history and pass it on to others to enjoy.
Anyway, when I went through my artworks, I came across many sketches pilled-up in a set of drawers. I had made these at the end of the nineties and in the beginning of 2000. I went through them and was quite amazed: I had all but forgotten, that I had been sketching so much! I remembered, I had bought a pile of standard, good drawing paper out then to improve my drawing skills. Most of the sketches were made in sanguine and Indian Red colour, because I wanted, at the same time, to try out the 'Old Masters' way of drawing and sketching. I went through them and I thought, well, these sketches form quite a great series – what can I do with them? – why not to make a booklet out of the pictures? I enlarged the book by adding sketches of later date as well. So again, it grew into the real art book.

What about the models for these sketches, found in your book, *Sketches by Willem Krijgsman?*

Well, the items I had chosen as my models were randomly taken from pictures at hand – interesting, inspiring photographs from newspapers, magazines, art books, picture books etc. But there are also free-hand, own made sketches. I especially wanted to depict certain feelings and emotions, not just pictures. So, when I went through these sketches, I realised, that they were showing very much, what I think is in all my arts important - the physical and mental human emotion. In my book you really find a variety of subjects: art history, human crisis situations in Africa, humanity, some of my idols in music, sculpture and painting also anatomy, all kinds of tribes and native people, despair, intimacy, erotica, even hairstyles and so on: many, many portraits and collage-like pictures. I need models - I remember that Rembrandt's students were learning by copying his drawings, etchings and paintings. I did not just copy the pictures. I had taken them as models for my sketches, but I was given them my own watermark, sometimes in a humoristic and grotesque manner.

In your book you have clearly arranged the sketches. Can you tell us about that?

Yes, I have chosen different items and arranged them like collages. I wanted no chapters. I thought it's boring to just put each sketch of the same item after the other. I wanted to reach contrasts between them, so, when the reader opens the 'picture pages' of the book he or she will find an interesting chain of sketches.

There are a lot of sanguine and Indian Red coloured sketches in your book. What about the technique?

At the time, that I was a student at the College of Visual Arts in Rotterdam, studying Architectural Shaping, we had lessons in drawing and were rehearsing different drawing techniques. We had to use different types of pencils like graphite pencils and Conté pencils in the colours black, white, grey and sanguine. I still have an old wooden drawing box from that time filled with graphite pencils, Conté pencils, charcoal, sharpener, small knife, blending stumps, rubber and kneaded erasers.
The sketches of sanguine, Indian Red and other colours, I have used in my book, I have often faded or shaded using blending stumps or soft kitchen paper dipped in ethanol, to get more volume to the pictures.

What about yourself, what drawing means to you?

I have been always drawing. As a child I was quite shy - in a way I still am - and drawing was and still is one way to express myself. Nowadays I express myself in wider artistic way, in visual arts, but the need is the same. So, drawing means a lot, really. At the elementary school, I was especially known as a child, who can draw well. In the fifth and sixth grade I had the highest numbers in drawing. A few times I was asked to draw a picture, as a present, for a teacher, who was leaving the school. I was also sometimes allowed to stay after school hours to finish my drawing. I was just sitting there in an empty schoolroom drawing. A cleaner came in and was asking, why I was still drawing there. She thought, I was there as punishment! At the end of the elementary school, they advised my parents to send me to a school, where I can learn drawing. But I ended up in technical education.

Had you been encouraged at home?

No, not especially. Of course, every child is drawing. My parents were not *that* interested. Later, when I was in my last years at elementary school, my mother liked the pictures I took home and she put some of them on the wall. I come from a family of six children, three sisters and two brothers. I was the youngest. I have a huge age difference with my family members: my youngest sister is seven years older and oldest brother nearly twenty years older than me. They were not so interested in their little brother. They were busy with their own matters. My second brother, who was 13 years older, though untrained, was very good in classical drawing. Besides, he was playing different instruments in a marching band and was a well-respected amateur actor. I looked up at him, though he never encouraged me in any way, but he certainly influenced me. One thing though I remember: my father took me, when I was four or five, in his lap. It was just before the in Holland very important celebration of Sinterklaas or Saint Nicolas Day, on the fifth of December. Sitting in his lap I was quietly watching the movement of his pencil, as he was skilfully sketching the Saint on his horse with his helper beside him. It felt like meditation. It seems to have been a very impressive experience, because I still recall the feeling: I was amazed, he could draw!

Did you realise you had a kind of talent in drawing?

I was a child. I just loved to draw. Of course, I saw that my pictures were valued. In my hometown Delft, I even won the first prize in drawing and colouring competition among all elementary schools. But it never felt exceptional. If I think about talent in general, I look at it as possibility to develop the natural skill in some field. I think, I had some kind of talent in drawing, but I needed to work hard to develop it.

What happened with your drawing after your technical studies?

I did two technical schools and finished as a cabinetmaker and an expert in furnishing production. So, while I was still drawing some now and then, it did not develop. Later on, when I tried to enter the College of Arts, my drawing skills weren't enough, so I didn't pass on to the Fine Art course. But because of my earlier technical education, they gave me the possibility to study Architectural Shaping. Although it wasn't the Fine Art program, I had wanted at first, I anyway got art education. I learned for example a lot about drawing, the techniques and drawing materials. We got lessons in figure drawing and we had to draw all kinds of objects, buildings etc. I also remember that we students regularly had to go to 'The Zoo of Blijdorp' in Rotterdam, drawing animals. The drawing teacher was with us and explained the principles of drawing animals. I really enjoyed being there and I learned a lot by simply watching animals and drawing their anatomy. Later on, I used all this knowledge, I'd got, in my artworks.

Did you see your technical studies as an obstacle in your artistic development?

No, not at all. At the age of twelve, I was already learning to use my hands in making furniture and exercising woodturning. Besides, in the first year we were also introduced in metal working. So, my hands became technically skilled. After four years I got my diploma as cabinetmaker. In the secondary technical school, the next step, I learned during four years of studies to connect physical skills as a cabinetmaker with the theoretical knowledge of how to produce furniture. This knowledge I could also use in my studies at the academy. Later on, when I developed my arts, I could use the knowledge of all my studies in the creation of my artworks. I've done a wide range of arts and I have worked also as a curator. So, you see, it helped me to become a many-sided visual artist.

You moved to Finland and worked as an interior architect, but you also started a career as a visual artist. Tell us about it.

When I moved to Finland after my studies in the beginning of the eighties, I worked as an interior architect. I was very focused on my job, but creatively it wasn't enough. I felt the need to do something freely in an artistic way. So, in my spare-time I started to make paper collages, assemblages, junk art, paintings and drawings, which I really enjoyed doing. In 1986 I begun to exhibit my artworks. Later, I concentrated more and more on drawing and was developing my drawing skills. In the beginning of 2005, I found clay as a new medium. Already in 1997, I had become a professional visual artist. I held many solo exhibitions and took part in a lot of group exhibitions.

So, at last you ended up into the art.

Yes, in a way I naturally focused on art. But again, I realised, that I have to work hard to develop my artistic skills.

Do you have special artists, who have inspired you in drawing?

Yes, many! It's hard to start mentioning them, because there are so many. I really like a lot of different styles in drawing. If I stay near my Dutch culture, I naturally have to mention Rembrandt's skilful drawings and etchings. Or, to mention the artist-illustrator Rien Poortvliet's fantastic gnomes-books and the picturesque drawings of the painter, graphic artist-illustrator Anton Pieck. While not directly drawing, I love the works of the Swedish painter and watercolourist Carl Larsson. I also like to praise the pencil and ink pen drawings by the Finnish painter Werner Holmberg. Then there are the marvellous drawings and watercolours of Auguste Rodin. And, drawings from the classical artists I admire: Leonardi da Vinci, Michelangelo, Albrecht Dürer, Bruegel and Hans Holbein. I also like to mention the drawings of François Boucher and Ingres. I'm also an admirer of Ilja Repin's sketches and drawings. I should not forget Norman Rockwell's marvellous illustrations or the awesome graphic works of Félicien Rops. There are many more but those come to mind!

In your book you haven't given any names or information under the pictures. Why so?

That's true. Most of the sketches have no name, they were just rehearsals. At the end of the book, I have listed each picture and explained its content. Besides, I wanted to give the readers freedom to interpret the sketches by themselves. I liked to create the situation as if being in an art gallery. So, I didn't want to disturb the images by text or information. I wanted the book to be a kind of exhibition in book form.

Do you see yourself as a writer now, that you have written three books about your arts?

No, I'm not a writer. Writing books is a profession. I am a visual artist. I see my books as art products, in which I show, analyse and explain my art. At the same time, they are working as catalogues. I hope the reader enjoys the intimacy of my sketches.

Interview by cultural journalists Susanna Eldoring and Leon Broendeg

For my sketches I have used different types of pencils: Conté à Paris (e.g. sanguine), the Indian Red colour and other colours by Faber-Castell's "Polychromos" pencils. I have also used different graphite pencils.

WORKS

Sketches by Willem Krijgsman is the art book about figurative sketches on paper by the in Finland living Dutch Visual Artist and Interior Architect, **Willem Krijgsman** (born in 1953, Delft). This is his third art book: in 2023 and 2024 Books on Demand published two books about his arts.

With an interesting interview, he explains, why he wanted to publish the book about his sketches. The publishing of his first art book made him aware of the plenty of art, he had made during the years. He thought, now, that he is 70, it is also a good reason to look back and go through his art-works and see, what he can do with them.

During the creation of his second book, he amazingly noticed a lot of sketches made around 25 years ago. Most of them were sketched in sanguine and Indian Red colour, trying out the *Old Master's* way of drawing and sketching. He decided to write again a new book. He says: *In three books I have introduced all my art – it feels like a trilogy.*

In his extensive, wonderfully illustrated, new art book he is showing us, how sketching can be art on its own. He touches a variety of subjects: art history, human crisis situations in Africa, humanity, some of his idols in music, sculpture and painting, anatomy, all kinds of tribes and native people, despair, intimacy, erotica, even hairstyles, with many portraits and collage-like pictures. The items, he had chosen as his models, were randomly taken from pictures at hand – interesting, inspiring photographs from newspapers, magazines, art books, picture books etc.

He is telling us, that he is needing models: *I remember that Rembrandt's students were learning by copying his drawings, etchings and paintings. I didn't just copy the pictures, that I had taken as models: I was given them my own watermark, sometimes in a humoristic and grotesque manner.*

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