

Her first success came early: shortly after graduating, Marliz Frencken showed very refined and precisely painted scenes of the world around us, such as those we see in photos, images from magazines, boxes of Drecht, the newspaper or a roll of wallpaper. A woman's world. The list of exhibitions grew steadily: Gallery Hans Gieles, First Blossom, Barbara Farber Gallery, Bébert, exhibitions by Jan Hoet, Ornis A. Gallery; and yet, you couldn't really say that Marliz Frencken was really embraced by the art world. However, she always continued working relentlessly every day in her studio, and when I visit her I find a storehouse filled to the brim with paintings and sculptures from various periods. In her ground-floor studio are large, thickly painted black and white depictions of a mother and child. The emotion in these paintings surges out to the edges, spilling over the edge. The smell of paint is penetrating. Overwhelming and confusing. I find myself besotted by the obsessiveness that shimmers in every room.

'I fell in love with those pictures', explains Marliz about her first oil paintings. 'I enjoyed the resistance that the images provoked, their mockery and irony and giving the painting a new, loving layer.' She presented these images in golden frames to further emphasize the banality. The 'Rijksaankopen' (National acquisition policy) purchased a large work in which three strips of wallpaper were literally copied in salmon pink with impasto stripes. A small, detailed portrait of Queen Astrid. King Hussein with his son. Pictures, all pictures that she painted mechanically, like a scanner, but with great concentration and love. The NRC review of her first exhibition was scathing. As the youngest teacher in Kampen, she hardly dared to look her students in the eye. She was certainly not ready for the avalanche of reactions. She tells me, for instance, that she flirted with pornographic images, but that she didn't dare to buy the magazines. Shortly afterwards she stopped teaching and simultaneously her attitude acquired something resolute, something unyielding. So this is not what you want, okay, but I'm going to continue anyway. If you, the art world, give me a whack, well ok, I'll continue even harder, it doesn't matter to me anymore. She wanted to make the case for women in a non-militant way, she felt obliged to do so: to take a stand in a misogynistic world. The catalogue that Marliz Frencken published in 1993 was based on a cheap Russian art catalogue from the second-hand bookstore De Slegte. It is a strange thing, not at all sophisticated, while the works shown are indeed that. The book with a red cover looks rather vulgar, like a Wehkamp catalogue. Marliz Frencken, oils is written defiantly on the jacket. In the time that Rob Scholte conquered the art world with his painting of a parking ticket and his copied postcard Utopia, 1986, with the stealing of ideas, her work met with a mixed reception. Scholte's work is perhaps more intellectual, coarser, more How to star(1). His reckless self-confidence is entirely at odds with Frencken's introversion. Scholte positioned himself as an image maker and worked with assistants, who produced his work. That would be impossible for Frencken. She painted wet-on-wet and mixed every colour on the palette herself. Rob Scholte appreciated her approach and purchased a work.

I believe that Marliz Frencken was ahead of her time; glamour was not yet an issue, and there were all sorts of unwritten rules in art, such as 'Thou shalt not paint Barbies' or 'fashion is superficial' or 'male themes are better than female themes'. It confuses me too: I don't like Barbies either, but why not? I played with them as a child, and yet I also slipped into this taboo and flinch at the sight of these perfect dolls. Artists such as Isa Genzken later showed

me that nothing is taboo, that there are no rules and that intensity trumps every subject, for instance the pasted receipts from a dismal period in New York that somehow convey her despair. The dolls in the sculpture exhibition in Munster. Yes, dolls, indeed it is possible. Or as Der Spiegel wrote: 'She operates with no safety net of art-world niceties.' (2) That is also how I see the universe of Marliz Frencken, you always have to take a deep breath, but that's because you need to be able to look without judgement, the work goes against all the rules. No niceties.

'I still keep all those pictures in large drawers, it was long before the Internet. My paintings showed the world very literally, the outside, the gloss. Always the surface. The love and concentration is found within and under the skin. Everything else is fake. I show a glamorous woman's world. I loved that glamour, as I also loved fashion, beautiful fabrics and colours.' Her expensive designer jacket was frowned upon in the art world, where the grimy attic romanticism prevailed. Gallery Bébert in Rotterdam took her into its circle and she felt at home there.

The Barbies preoccupy my thoughts. After various stylistic periods, she made another installation with Barbie dolls in 2012 at Ornis A. Gallery, still in Utrecht at that time. In a review, I read about charcoal portraits of middle-aged women with rather sour expressions, about an amateurish impression and that her engagement with womanhood commands respect because at least there are no severed penises are on display and no denunciations. But this reviewer would have preferred the work to be about something else. Who decides the rules?

Barbies are viewed suspiciously; all girls at the academy have to go through a doll period, but still, when is it acceptable and when is it not? It is certain that a transformer, a car, is received with more openness. But there is a small painting by Marliz Frencken in which Barbie almost comes to life, it is full of melancholy and sadness. Yes, simply a good work.

In the attic stands a large Ikea wardrobe with an extra floor built onto it, full of pietàs. The female figures appear encased in ice due to the resin that oozes from all sides. There is a pregnant black widow, women dropping children from their hands, or with a child hanging limply over an arm, pins have been pricked: a voodoo paradise. Together these strange, disturbing sculptures seem like an investigation into the relationship between mother and child, parental love, the complex love from which nobody can detach themselves and which is so defining for a life. The hatch between the adult world and child's world is set ajar; you rip the eyes out of your favourite doll, maybe it gets placebo eyes, sometimes you pull its hair out while simultaneously hugging it frantically. Your mother knits another jacket for your cuddly toy. All these mothers with children. Women dance, spread their legs, carry crockery sets while being pecked by a bird, a royal child worships the mother with a crown of thorns. Every sculpture is so full of details and shines in all its outrageous splendour. Together an insanely exuberant installation, perhaps too extreme for our rectilinear Rietveld country. 'Isolation is beneficial', says Frencken. Even though she calls it beneficial in retrospect, at the time it was more a case of total solitude. The exterior was bursting with glamour, but she sat alone almost every evening. On her phone she shows me a portrait of her mother; piercing brown eyes, dark curly hair, a red jacket. This was the only real painting that she saw until she was about thirteen. The portrait hangs in her house in Hilversum, but a copies are also hung in her holiday home, in her studio, and as this screensaver. Her mother watches over her like a Madonna.

On page two of Marliz Frencken's catalogue *Cruel Beauty* (2012) is a photo of her mother in a wedding dress, a photo that haunts me; a beautiful woman with a gentle smile in a simple, discrete wedding dress with a collar and palms embroidered on the lapel. Her hands disappear beneath the veil. Her sweet, open expression looks toward the future, full of anticipation of a life with her husband, perhaps children and prosperity.

'She always wore beautiful dresses, made of fine fabrics, jewels, strings of pearls. There were embroidered tablecloths and silver crystal bowls. When I was sad because I saw my mother's beauty withering away, I went hiding under those beautiful fabrics, seeking comfort. The visual aspect gave me tranquillity and warmth, the beauty brought me solace and salvation. I built my own worlds with Barbie dolls. Before she died, my mother gave me a set of Talens paints.'

Immediately after the birth of Marliz, her mother fell seriously ill and spent her days in bed at home or in hospital, while her body gradually gave up. When Marliz was thirteen years-old, her mother died leaving her behind with her father and three brothers.

'I saw so much as a child', says Marliz Frencken. She speaks with love and admiration for her mother, who bore her illness so patiently and always remained so positive.

The painting of her mother is so dear to her because it evokes that integrity and innocence. In her work she seeks beauty, perhaps an impossible beauty in those very first images, as a counterbalance but also to scorn the world. Outside and inside, an acerbic darkness and a sincere naivety.

The catalogue *Cruel Beauty* is about the comfort that beauty brought her. The work is her own, but entirely uncompromising. It is sometimes like the scream of Munch, too pure and direct.

'With the black and white paintings of the mother and child, I go back to my childhood. If you have missed your mother as a child, you always retain that physical longing. Just like a child that has died and always stands by your side, the longing remains, even as a grown woman. I lost a dog that I adored and it walks forever beside me, as it were. Your body is the measure, the source, all experiences are stored somewhere in the body. You make a drawing out of that individual physicality and in those proportions.'

The black and white paintings are almost too emotional, full of sensitivities and balancing on the tightrope of good taste, far removed from the minimalist modesty that is so appreciated in the art world.

But then, on another floor in the house, I see the work from the nineteen eighties. Small, delicate pieces of paper, graph paper with smudges, small shreds of paper with coloured areas, a black wave, triangles, a blue sphere or just completely yellow. Like mysterious signs. Incantations. These works are so fragile and delicate, as if the universe briefly meets the earth. Or a blue-painted globe encapsulates the sky on a summer day.

And there is a collection of subdued sculptures with a cardboard-like colour. These are reminiscent of Giacometti, the reference is clear, the tradition is present, the handprint visible. The fragility of the sculptures makes their existence waver. 'All the art of the past rises up before me, the art of all ages and all civilizations, everything becomes simultaneous, as if space had replaced time. Memories of works of art blend with affective memories, with my work, with my whole life.' (Alberto Giacometti)

By now, all the works have been photographed and arranged into folders; it has given her confidence to survey all those years again, but at the same time she feels a kind of embarrassment for the quantity.

'When I look at the body of work I realize that it's worth it, then I see the truth of it. Then I dare to trust it more, Ornis (her gallerist) has been tremendously supportive in that respect. In moments of weakness, I begin to doubt. Art is often a showcase. In my images I have dug very deeply, I wanted to show love. And beauty. I think that Jan Hoet recognized this.'

Now, we too can go and see her work. In the exhibition Arcadia in Diepenheim, at the Artissima Art Fair 2015 and at Ornis A. gallery in Amsterdam. And now that it has finally left the house, it will reach many places, of that I am sure.

Text by Hanne Hagenars

(1) How to Star is the title of a catalogue by Rob Scholte from 1988

(2) (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/moma-retrospective-to-highlight-german-artist-isa-genzken-a-929704.html>)