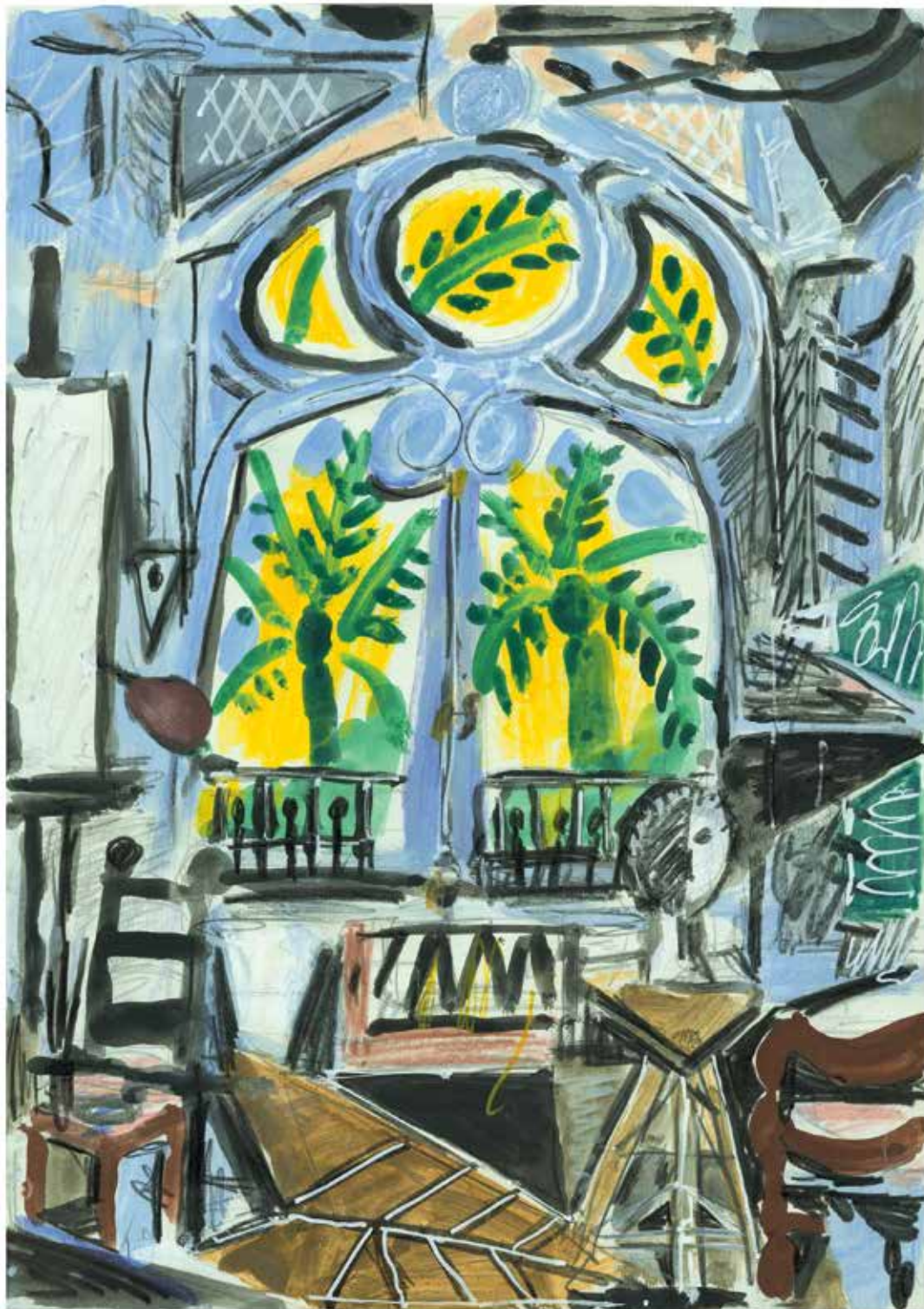


Marijn van Kreijl

Nude in the Studio



30 June — 9 September 2018



Interview with Marijn van Kreij

9 April 2018
Valentijn Byvanck

In the summer of 1955, Picasso moved his studio to La Californie, a Belle Époque villa from 1920 situated in the hills surrounding Cannes with a scenic view of the Mediterranean Sea. The large Jugendstil windows and the outlook on a garden with cactuses, eucalyptus and palm trees found their way into Picasso's paintings. These 'interior landscapes', as Picasso called them, depict unfinished paintings and sculptures, painters' materials, musical instruments and miscellaneous objects that he used as props in his work.

Over the past few years, Marijn van Kreij has worked on a series of drawings and paintings modeled after Picasso's 'interior landscapes'. This interview takes place in the artist's studio, among thousands of sheets of paper: drawings and paintings crammed into boxes on the floor, stacked into high piles on tables, stored in overflowing cabinets, attached to the walls by the hundreds—sometimes a singular image, sometimes clusters of about 70 similar pieces, a dozen stools of all sizes and shapes, a table filled with paint tubes, brushes, some in glass jars with murky water and stacks of books on Picasso.

THE BEGINNING

Usually, I arrive here in the morning and I try to start drawing right away. It calms me. Then I tend to other things, such as emails. Later in the day, sometimes when I'm working deep into the evening or night, a different kind of concentration arises. All kinds of things spring to life and the works start communicating with one another. Often, I just begin to do something and then a second step follows naturally, it presents itself to me.

Over the past years I've collected lots of books about Picasso, especially about his later work from 1950 onwards. Some books specifically deal with the significance of the studio to Picasso. I leaf through a book until something speaks to me: it can be a fragment or a color combination, but also a title like *Nude in the Studio*. In that case I simply keep looking at the particular painting until I find a detail that I can work with, and immediately start drawing. I often use paper that already has something on it: an advertisement leaflet, or a sheet I've put some brushstrokes on. I rarely throw anything away. I have boxes full of drawings here, from as far back as right after my academy years. I like the idea of always being able to add and change things. The series with blue windows for example was a good occasion for using those sheets as a base. On that base I start out simply copying what I see. I'm not after an exact copy; the image is just a starting point. I work with different proportions and materials as well. Gouache where Picasso used oil paint or ink and pencil instead of oil pastels. The painting process goes rather quickly, it only takes a few minutes, than it needs to dry. I'm often working on several drawings at a time, I add something and then move on to the next one.



Picasso continued producing a lot until the end of his life. That dedication and the resulting control over the materials is best felt in his later paintings. Those paintings received a lot of criticism at the time: critics argued that the artist got stuck in the classical themes and lost his innovative drive. Yet, I see a great freedom in these works. Everything is painted in the moment. Picasso was experimenting directly on the canvas, with strange color combinations and odd transformations. Toward the end of his life, his body had internalized all necessary knowledge and he was able to apply it freely. It's very different from his cubist period: those paintings are very meticulous and construed in comparison. When I began my first sketches with Picasso fragments, this wasn't on my mind at all though. Now I have access to a database in which you can see what Picasso was working on, day by day. He made a painting almost every day. I deeply admire that dedication to practice and craftsmanship. Still, I find I'm looking for something different in my own work.

I like to take an existing image as a point of departure for my work. That means there's always another maker involved. You can call it naïve, but I've never really understood the difference between taking a picture yourself and using a reproduction from a book. To me, an image in a book or on a screen is part of the physical reality we create and surround ourselves with. I use the time I spend in my studio to look at these images and make them my own.

THE STUDIO WINDOW

The drawings hung on the wall of my studio right here show the window of Picasso's workspace in the house where he lived, *Villa La Californie* in Cannes. In the 1950s Picasso worked there on

a number of paintings and drawings that depicted his studio. My fascination with these works grew slowly over time. It began with me thinking about the studio as a place for withdrawal. In a studio you're creating your own world, it's a place where you can give things time and play with the materials you've gathered around you without further considerations. But at a certain point you'll need to relate to the outside world again. I find this contradiction interesting. That's why I spend so much attention to the window in Picasso's studio through which you see the palm trees in his yard. The window symbolizes the borderline between inside and outside.

Most of my work on the series with blue windows was done in the summer of 2017. I wanted to work with an empty mind, without judgment about right or wrong. It's hard to avoid feeling that one drawing is better than another, but the moment you consider this while creating, things start to go wrong. That summer I was reading a biography about John Cage, who wasn't really aiming to express something of his own through his compositions, but instead wanted to let sounds be the way they are. I tried to adopt a similar approach to painting. In a way you're working with a certain sense of disinterestedness. I committed myself to accepting anything, whatever happens. This might sound easy, but it's harder than you think.

The paintings look alike, and yet they are completely dissimilar. On the one hand I remain somewhat true to Picasso's example, and the same pictorial elements and colors—blue and green—constantly recur. But then, one day, I choose red or orange, and I allow this to happen too. Now I am arranging these works, in order to present them in clusters of about 70 drawings each. When you combine these

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works, a new kind of unity arises. When you look at the whole, you see all the same windows, but if you compare two of them, you realize there's only differences.

When we think about art we still often think of a unique object, something that is permanent and everlasting. I believe my work challenges that assumption, but not in an ironic or cynical manner. It shows that something can be done differently each time. That's exactly the beauty of it. In this series one piece might be a rather exact copy of the part from Picasso's original painting, but that doesn't really matter anymore. I'm trying to make the act of constant repetition tangible. Over time, the repetition empties out the image. At first you're looking at that window and the palm trees, but after examining more of them, everything becomes just form. Eventually you begin to freely associate with those forms, at least that's what I do, then suddenly you perceive a dog's nose in the image or the three small windows begin to symbolize something else entirely.

DRAWING AS EXERCISE

I have never felt like a painter. Making a painting feels very definitive. I find it suffocating. Drawing, working on paper, means something different to me. I connect it with a proposal, or an exercise. That's actually how I started making the 'Picasso grids', the repetition of a single detail onto a large sheet of paper. I couldn't linger too long on any fragment that I had copied in paint. I was forced to keep on going, or the work would never get finished! If I felt that something had gone wrong, I could give it another try in another cell of the grid. Eventually, of course, these so-called errors turned out to be the most interesting part. I try to avoid making things permanent. Here,

in the studio, everything is still free and open and I'm making all sorts of connections on my own. The work is alive. That's what you also should be feeling in a museum or in an exhibition space. But the world imposes the idea that a work of art is finished at some point, and then nothing more is allowed to happen to it. If it were up to me, everything I make would be considered a living object.

Sometimes people might say 'I could do that myself' when they see my work. I'm actually fine with that response. It means they can relate to the work. If you're only showing off skillfulness, I feel you're excluding the viewer. I like it when viewers can transport themselves into a work. I love the idea of not being great at something and doing it anyway, the punk attitude that favors will and expression over capability. At the same time I've become very interested in artisanal crafts again lately, where it's all about mastering certain skills but authorship is less important. My work always arises from contradictions such as these. I have an urge to say something, but I am aware of the limitations every utterance implies.

THE EXHIBITION

The making of exhibitions is very important to my work. Most of my studio drawings were made without considering an exhibition. That's comforting and soothing, it leaves things open. Yet it is essential for me to bring the work outside the studio and to reflect on how it can take on a different meaning in another place. The space in which you show your work changes it, and the work changes the space. The notable thing about Marres is that it really preserves the sense of a large residential house with different rooms. I want to let those rooms act as themselves and explore

the way they feel; what is the first thing you see when you enter, how do you construct an exhibition for the visitor? I'm not interested in just presenting work and imposing it upon visitors. Ideally a kind of exchange with the viewer arises, they look at the work while also having other things actively on their mind.

A spectator should be able to get as close to the work as possible. Also literally: it's great that it turned out possible to show all works loosely on the walls, without framing them. My next step is considering how to juxtapose the drawings and paintings with something else. In previous exhibitions I combined the 'Picasso grids' with a sound piece or a record player that visitors could operate by themselves. Now the addition is more subtle. I'm working on mobiles, loosely assembled sound sculptures constructed on the fly from all kinds of found materials. This will become a game of chance. A slight breeze will cause you to hear a soft tingling, and a strong wind may produce a louder ticking. The sound will blend with the sounds of the street and from elsewhere in the building. I hope to add something to this that makes people point their ears.

My collection of stools began with the idea that I always enjoy having a place to sit, when visiting an exhibition. Not necessarily in order to watch something. It can also be a place to think or read a little. I want to create a pleasant atmosphere in which people linger. It all started with revolving office chairs that I knew from a video installation by Bruce Nauman, *Mapping the Studio (Fat Chance John Cage)* from 2001, in which you are surrounded by night views of his studio. In the middle of the space there were desk chairs in which you could lean back. I just had taken the backs off the chairs in my own studio and

began placing the resulting stools in my exhibitions. This led to a whole collection of sitting objects—some designed by artists and architects, others simply from IKEA. What I like is that each stool carries its own history and ideology. You could compare it to the specific background of each visitor who enters the exhibition.

I always make last-minute additions to an exhibition. I've got a few poems, without knowing how to incorporate them into the installation. Just like the aluminum can tops or small whatnots that I use for my mobiles, I keep them for reasons that I might come to understand at a later point. Eventually one will detect a pattern in this habit of collecting things. You reach insight into things that others have been telling you for years, but that you didn't notice because you were so caught up in them.

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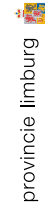


The work of MARIJN VAN KREIJ (Middelrode, 1978) consists of drawings and paintings on paper, collages, objects, slide projections, videos and sound pieces that are brought together in carefully composed exhibitions—in which he regularly involves other artists, designers, writers or musicians. For this exhibition he worked together with graphic designer Akiko Wakabayashi and artist Raphael Langmair. The exhibition's title piece *Nude in the Studio* was painted together with pupils from the Japanese mountain village Kamiyama. Marijn van Kreij previously showed his works in solo exhibitions in Amsterdam, Berlin, Haarlem, London and Zurich. He was awarded the Dutch Royal Award for Modern Painting in 2013 and the ABN AMRO Art Award in 2016, a prize awarded as an incentive for talent in the Netherlands. Van Kreij lives and works in Amsterdam and teaches at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie.

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IMAGES

Cover

- Untitled (Picasso, Le Carnet de La Californie, 1955)*, 2018. Gouache and pencil on paper, 29.7 x 42 cm
- Untitled (Picasso, The Studio, 1956)*, 2018. Gouache, pencil and oil pastel on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm
 - Untitled (Picasso, Le Carnet de La Californie, 1955)*, 2017–18. Gouache, pencil and ink on paper, 29.7 x 42 cm
 - Drawings from the series *Untitled (Picasso, The Studio, 1956)*, 2016–18. Gouache, pencil and oil pastel on different kinds of paper and printed matter, in variable sizes

Poster

- Untitled (Picasso, The Studio, 1956)*, 2013–16 (detail). Gouache, acrylic and pencil on paper, 195 x 152 cm
- Untitled (Picasso, Red Interior with Transatlantic Blue, 1958)*, 2017. Gouache and pencil on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm
 - Untitled (Picasso, L'atelier de La Californie, 1955, The Palm at the End of the Mind)*, 2018. Gouache, pencil and oil pastel on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm

Marres is a House for Contemporary Culture located in the heart of the old town of Maastricht. Marres develops with artists, musicians, designers, chefs and performers, a new vocabulary for the senses. In addition to bringing a lively program of exhibitions, presentations and performances, Marres also features a beautiful garden and a wonderful restaurant.

Marres
 House for Contemporary Culture

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