**Kees Blom anno 2020**

The painter Kees Blom goes back to basics, his basics. After having painted a number of complex bowls, there was a need to go back to his basics. This does by no means, mean back to the beginning, because within this period of time, years and years of experience have been built up in order to enable him to fulfil this plan. It seems deceivingly easy to paint such a simple bowl but, facing the constraints he put himself under, this means a real challenge. The aim is/was to finish a painting within one day (twelve hours). The result is not a painting done in one day, but a painting based on a lifetime of experience as a professional painter and as a human being. Such a challenge is not new, Kees Blom finds himself amongst excellent fellow painters. A lot of great names before him have put constraints on themselves as well, in order to get to their ‘basics’.

**Series 1. Bowls**

A painter and a bowl

The challenge Kees Blom has accepted is going to be visualised in a series of paintings, each depicting a bowl. The result will be a painting in which Kees Blom concentrates on one single characteristic that interests him, both as an artist and as a human being. As an example, the fact that as an independent artist you always have to work with full concentration, be disciplined and you need to be willing to face the reality of yourself. From an artistic point of view this results in perfectly executed bowls. However, life is not always that adaptable and we need warmth and attention and a good life that consists of more than just milk and honey. To live and let live is very important to him.

**Bowl Nr. 1.1. Discipline**

Kees Blom, Bowl Nr. 1.1. Discipline, 2020, oil on panel, 90 x 90 cm, gilded frame handmade

**The challenge :**

To produce a bowl of this purity demands foremost discipline and that surely is a serious mental process. The great example is, of course, Rembrandt van Rijn who showed from an early age that the artistic process takes place in the mind. This was clearly visible in one of Rembrandt’s earliest self-portraits. Looking at his easel from a distance, thinking things through and knowing what he wanted to achieve until he knew exactly what to do. Then applying the discipline to carry it out, exactly as he planned it in his head.

**The answer by Kees Blom :**

Just like Rembrandt I look at my easel from a distance and contemplate how to portray, the best way possible, this little bowl, made to hold a steaming hot cup of tea or delicious hot chocolate. To get to the point that this little bowl becomes a bowl holding a lovely feeling. And this is not at all simple. The approach I decide to take is to create a bowl which looks as though it has just been emptied to the very last drop and has been put down while one still savours the warm drink. This decision now dictates my way of working. Fixing and creating this state of mind is the essence of my ‘discipline’ now, and I have to hurry because time is ticking fast. Next step is to prepare the palette. This always takes at least one hour. The colours, the different tones, do not hold any secrets anymore for me and the action of painting itself becomes more or less a matter of ‘tap-tap’.

**Bowl Nr.1.2. Concentration**

Kees Blom, Bowl Nr.1.2.Concentration, 2020, oil on panel, 90 x 90 cm, gilded frame handmade

**Practice makes perfect…**

As can be seen in this video, Kees Blom wipes with a piece of cloth in the wet transparent paint in order to resurface some of the previous layer(s). This bowl has been built up from various transparent layers, on top of the first layer, which is more or less opaque. The full circle was drawn loosely by hand directly in the wet paint in one go. Painted directly, without any pencil sketches, in one session of not more than four hours. The next step of applying the glazings is also a real test of patience.

**The challenge :**

One way of working is based on a very old challenge: to draw a perfect circle freehand. Painters who were able to draw a perfect circle were always greatly admired since Greek Antiquity. Again, a self-portrait by Rembrandt van Rijn, now wearing a painter’s beret, is an example of somebody who took up this challenge. It is a very large self-portrait in which he has drawn two perfect circles on the backwall. The subject is not Rembrandt himself, but his skills.

**The answer by Kees Blom :**

As a painter it is a very satisfying gesture to draw a full circle in one big move, or, in this case an ellipse form. It definitely has very much to do with having self-confidence and it is also a moment of complete concentration. But being so self-assured as Rembrandt? I do also very much appreciate the symbolism and way of working of Ensō, the Japanese notion of a circle. Also, here a full circle is painted in one gesture, without being allowed to make any changes. In this way the character of the artist is fully shown. It is therefore really a snapshot of which each time the result can be a surprise. Only after long practice and if you are completely free of mind and body, you are able to draw a perfect Ensō.

After painting the circle, I’m faced with yet another challenge as I have chosen a viewpoint from above. I’ve painted several bowls where the focus was concentrated on the outside, this time I wanted to paint a bowl of which the whole inside would be visible. Instead of facing a nice scenery I was facing a reversed mountain of ‘white’. Nothing to hold on to, just focussing on layers of either a dull or a shiny effect. Minimal colour, maximal tone and all kinds of differentiations in between, which optically looks like white but in fact is built up from a whole range of different colours. This means, while you are painting you have to stop in time, you have to let go in time, both your hands and your feelings. The inside of the bowl was a real challenge, working in a sober manner with a minimal palette to get to a nice soft shiny result.

**Bowl Nr.1.3. Patience**

Kees Blom, Bowl Nr.1.3 Patience, 2021, oil on panel, 90 x 90 cm, gilded frame handmade

**The challenge :**

Again, a way of working in which you put yourself under a number of constraints. A lot of painters claim to be working with a restricted number of colours for instance. Mondria(a)n does this during his mature style, he uses only the colours yellow, red and blue (and the non-colours white, black and grey). And as if that wasn’t enough, he takes it a whole step further: he wants to achieve that none of these colours dominate but that everything in the painting is in a perfect equilibrium. His unfinished ‘Victory Boogie Woogie’ shows you his intense search: painstakingly patient he applied small pieces of coloured tape in different places to check the results again and again in order to decide how to proceed.

**The answer by Kees Blom :**

Patience, patience, patience, not so much needed when painting this bowl but even more so needed as a human being right now. In this sense this bowl has helped me a lot. The little bare branches, the tiny soft pink buds, they look like nothing, but life is there: in the branches you see it in their soft glow. Just like Mondria(a)n I’m searching for balance, a balance within myself. This means you need more than just being patient, you need hope, especially hope, and this I get from the green colour of the bowl. Green is the colour of hope. It isn’t yet the exuberant, explosive yellowish green but a more modest variegation with lots of different shades of green because the waiting is still long. The cherry blossom tree already knows, and I can also feel it: the vigour of Spring will continue. The long wait pays off, because the outcome is certain.