

profile philip akkerman



Portrait of a Gentleman,
Above, Philip Akkerman, 1999;
below left, Self-Portrait 2000
No. 5, 2000, oil on board;
below right, Self-Portrait 1999
No. 74, 1999, oil on board

"I shall never stop doing self-portraits, I could not do anything else." For 20 years Dutch artist Philip Akkerman has painted nothing but his own portrait. Ranging between three small-scale sizes, these paintings vary from being passive and considered studies to seeming piercing and violent. Akkerman made the decision to use the self-portrait as it was the only subject he felt he would never tire of; as a conceptual restraint he added the challenge to do this and nothing else. On a certain level what he was attempting to do was like trying to decode a combination lock; he knew his task might be endless. Fifteen hundred paintings later, Philip Akkerman is still following his "rule" to "paint one portrait a day until the end of days."

"In the beginning I considered myself a conceptual artist," he says. "Later on I got more and more involved with painting itself and now


I do not care about the subject of the work anymore."

For Akkerman, one of the attractions of the self-portrait is the fact that the subject also physically makes the work, therefore the meaning can never be detached from the making. He insists that style is less of an issue than keeping to the routine, yet the reason he uses an "Old Master's technique" of systematically making a drawing, adding tone and finally colour is because it allows room for his "intuition". "It is a clever way of painting, making it possible for a painter to become better each year. Within this technical system the possibilities are infinite." Despite the differences between each painting, Akkerman insists that he is not an expressionist, nor governed by mood.

"I am not interested in style, not at all, I never have been. I am not a post-modernist; I am not playing

with styles. I just make the paintings I want to make and they happen to be of great diversity."

In one painting the artist will represent himself as if he is deformed or grotesque; in another he will perhaps use a palette of heightened colour. At other times the mood is more subdued. By using a limited subject it is somehow easier for the viewer to recognize the differences from one painting to the next, whilst avoiding being distracted by categorization or even falling into looking for technical proficiency.

"I have no fears, I allow every thought and idea that pops into my mind into the painting. I can do that because I have a very strong frame, one subject which is the first and last of all art – the self-portrait, the portrait of the human race and of existence. Then I have one technique that I use. Within this frame I am free to do everything" 



Philip Akkerman

Show Philip Akkerman
Location Andrew Mummery Gallery,
Compton Street, London EC1
(020 7251 6265)
Dates 8 Nov-2 Dec
Contact Andrew Mummery Gallery.
Paintings from £2,000

Interview Gemma de Cruz

