

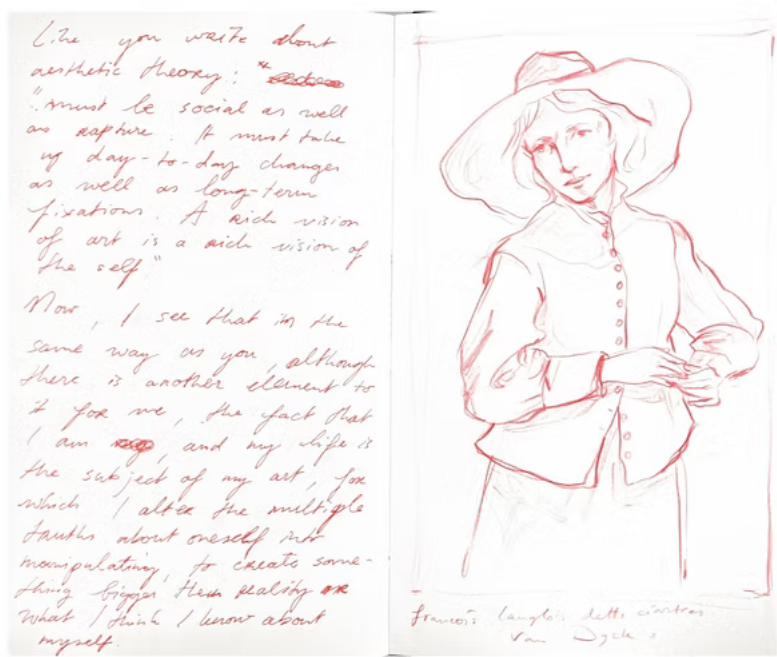
Behind the headscarf: Joline Kwakkenbos' residency at Il Palmerino



Joline Kwakkenbos is a Dutch painter and writer who spent a month at Il Palmerino, between March and April. She occupied the lovely blue room, the one overlooking the street of Il Palmerino, which comes to an end a few hundred meters further on. Imbued with a fin-de-siècle atmosphere, and often wearing a distinctive headscarf, Joline is an artist for whom fashion, and even more so, craftsmanship, are essential, and a part of her work as a self-portraitist, though not at its core. Fashion is indeed a periphery, as well as a clear sign of consciousness, a consciousness which seems to truly be the subject of study for Joline, the one on which she focuses. The garment, the accessory, thus formulate, like her paintings, a communication that operates both overtly and covertly, in an invisible sphere that lies beyond and beneath language.

There is a particularity to the representation of the Self, which stems from the fact that it is an elusive object, whose trace is always fleeting and versatile, like the image we see in the mirror. Joline's work precisely dwells on the possibility of an irreducible Self, despite the impermanence of its features. Linked to representation, her paintings yet translate an inner dialogue, as she confided during a conversation in the residence studio, and wrote a few days later: *"Historically, portraiture has centered on precisely this – how one wishes to be seen by others. But for me, it's not about external perception; it's about self-exploration."*

Just as literature, from which she draws inspiration, her paintings invite us to envision ourselves – literally, and visually – differently. Besides, the history of painting, like that of literature, is permeated by this difference to oneself, this side step, a form of invitation, often silent, sometimes even sacred and subterranean, akin to Antonio Donghi and his painting representing a *Donna al caffè* (1932). One might wonder whether she is the object of gaze or the guest of our soul, like a pasolinian angel who says nothing but looks, loves and withdraws without a word.



Juvenile without being so, political without explicitly intending it, Joline's art thus reveals itself to be a subtle blend of ambivalences. Her practice of writing letters addressed to her painterly namesake, as well as to deceased female figures like Vernon Lee, is part of the Janus-faced nature of her art. This intertwining of the literary and the aesthetic seems to be embodied even in certain recurring motifs in her work, such as her headscarf, mentioned at the outset. It may recall the one worn by Simone de Beauvoir, in a desire to

shorten the daily ritual of "beautification." Although Joline shares Beauvoir's practical reason for wearing the headscarf – one that could subtly allude to materialist feminism – she primarily conceives it as an accessory bearing historical significance, which is also precisely that of a Dutch identity. It is even something she became more aware of as she observes the amused, surprised, or inquisitive reactions of those she encounters:

"I completely relate to de Beauvoir's practical reason for wearing a headscarf! I was frustrated with my hair constantly getting in the way while painting, so I used a tea towel to keep it back. Then, one day, I wore it in public and someone commented that I 'looked very Dutch!' (...) Isn't it fascinating how something as simple as a tea towel can stir curiosity, amazement, or even confusion?"

One of Joline's paintings, exhibited at the Shapeshifters show at the Tracey Emin Foundation studio, even brings to mind the cover of *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (1958). Furthermore, the very project of Beauvoir's memoirs was to reconcile life and literature; it seems that the self-portrait initiates something similar in painting. The visual diary covered in small red sketches that Joline holds, and which she mentions in a letter addressed to Vernon Lee on March 17, is for her a medium of self-understanding, weaving a thread, or drawing a line, between two realities.



Inheriting the long tradition that characterizes the self-portrait, and which an exhibition named *Il Ritratto dell'Artista* in Forlì is currently retracing, Joline does not fail to interrogate it, opening new spaces for creation that are as many freedoms allowing her to envisage herself differently. Modern and androgynous figures, such as Vita Sackville-West, one of Virginia Woolf's lovers who loved to transform into Julian, or Romaine Brooks, are among her inspirations.

Now exhibited at the Homecoming gallery in Amsterdam, Joline Kwakkenbos is a promising artist. The Il Palmerino association thanks her for her month-long residency, and her yearning to rekindle the presence of Vernon Lee, which we know was a great help for young people aspiring to a career in art. May this spiritual bond inspire Joline as she continues along her own creative path.

Alan B.

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