

> **Jeroen Laureyns**

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ARTSTORY 9: The house of memories of Caroline Van den Eynden

On Sunday the 20th of September at six thirty in the evening I left my home in the Pastorijstraat in Antwerp to go by bike to the workshop of Caroline Van den Eynden on the Boomsesteenweg in Aartselaar.

It was a superb, sunny late summer evening, when I left my 19th century dwelling and set out through the endless suburbs of Antwerp, to look for the workshop that could be found in a hangar on an industrial site. On the way I must have passed by the parental home of the artist in Wilrijk, but that was something I did not yet know at the time.

Still this place is of major importance in her beautiful, small models, which are all going back to a modernist block of flats at the Rucaplein in Antwerp where she spent her youth. It's from those memories of that building that she now, in the hangar along the Boomsesteenweg, puts together her models and builds her works with the materials available at the corner shop on one of the most infamous shopping motorways in Belgium. The Boomsesteenweg looks like a "strip" but one in Suburban Flanders. With those materials she constructs meticulous small glass houses, out of which stairs that lead nowhere protrude, as well as the signposts which are devoid of text, token and symbols. They look like small show-cases, displays that have become jewelry in itself and in which the absence of human figures evokes an agreeable emptiness, one that reminds us of the by the masses abandoned urban decors and the detached houses by Edward Hopper.

There is something about these models that attracts individuals looking for reflection. The emptiness is not dismal at all, the transparent little spaces don't evoke social phobia, the absence of figures, movement or sound show us merely an agreeable form of silence. Maybe this is because the artist, who studied interior design and multimedia, does not pursue a literal reproduction of the building to which these objects go back, but tries from her memory of the materials of the building to reload on a smaller scale the feelings that she has left of those experiences? Almost as a surrealistic object, but a cleaner variation of it. It is not hard to see how these objects fit in a certain History of the Arts and have their predecessors in for example the installations of Louise Bourgeois who in the installation "Red Room-Parents" revitalizes the oppressive experiences of her childhood, or also in the sole homes of Du Cordier, like "Trou Madame" where as a spectator you can find some kind of mental shelter, or more recently the models of deserted public spaces from the series "Excercising Nowwheres" by Hans Op de Beeck.

But in contrast to Bourgeois and De Cordier the artist doesn't use weathered materials and there isn't any melancholy present. She doesn't even use the models as a form of cultural criticism that wishes to counter the utopian scheme of the modernist architects (the "new living" with "new materials" for the "new man"). In spite of the discomfort she felt during her youth in that building, this is not a squaring of accounts. Not even with the second building out of her childhood, a 19th century gentleman's house belonging to her grandmother that had been radically modernized by her grandfather-architect.

For that there is too much love for the materials with which she works and she makes every creation a shrine over and over again. An immaculate shrine for the memories that are indissolubly intertwined with her youth. It is this exceptional combination of materials, which under other circumstances would

only evoke cold sentiments and clean associations, with a warm, human touch which makes her work so attractive to me. Like her grey metal ladder with straight angles which would only cause pain on hands and feet when used normally, that gets something human thanks to the green marble colored foot on which it stands.

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