

[Motto]

*Only in my poems can I make my home.
While I still know that I can find those doors
In wilderness, in woods, on streets or moors,
I have no care, wherever I may roam.*

Jan Slauerhoff

From the poem 'Woninglooze' [Homeless]

[Title]

A Painting is like a House

INTRODUCTION

Hans Vandekerckhove is an unhurried painter. His work is also an invitation to contemplation. Invariably, he stops time and banishes all sound from his paintings. He allows his world to gradually solidify, along with the oil paint. Life is preserved, as it were, under a bell jar.

Yet the work of Hans Vandekerckhove does not lock the viewer out. On the contrary, it is open and inviting, even generous. The space, which plays such a crucial role in his paintings, begs to be entered. Like a contemporary Alice, the viewer can step inside a colourful and benevolent universe: a Wonderland of sweeping landscapes – with or without a greenhouse as a recurring motif – sleek modernist architecture, secluded gardens and, occasionally, ruins. Often grandiose and overwhelming, but always protective.

Hans Vandekerckhove has recently added the intimacy of the living room to his repertoire. But, here too, light plays a crucial role: light as a source of life, and as the foundation of the painterly arts. Without light there is no vision, no gaze, no line, no surface, no colour.

Hans Vandekerckhove admires Henri Matisse, the great French master who felt that his paintings ought to be like a comfortable armchair in which the spectator – a traveller – could recover from his fatigue. Like the paintings of Matisse, those by Hans Vandekerckhove – regardless of the extent to which they are inspired by the visible and tangible world – are primarily mental landscapes. The painting is a haven, a shelter, an ideal and perfect world; a space apart that is both enchanted and enchanting. It is no coincidence that the book you hold in your hands is entitled *Gimme Shelter*.

A painting is a sacred space, although I do not consider the word 'sacred' to have any religious significance in this context. What it does mean, however, is that the painting is a place, one that is governed by different laws to those of physics, in which there is no gravity or chronological time, and where only the law of paint and painting holds sway. There is light, but only where the painter desires it to fall.

Hans Vandekerckhove paints a house. At the same time, the painting itself is a home. His house. To explain it by paraphrasing the Dutch writer-traveller Jan Slauerhoff: 'Only in my poems can I make my home.'

PAINT

Hans Vandekerckhove has his own particular way of painting. It might not be exceptional, but it is special. The painting process is slow. And that is not to mention the preparation, which usually involves long walks in places such as the north of England, the Spanish Pyrenees and the Belgian Ardennes.

"Nomadic travel is a breath of fresh air compared to the sedentary life in the studio," says the painter. "Walking expands your personality towards the horizon. You discover the world between you and the horizon. In my studio I try to internalise that world. You shut the outside world out, in order to look inside, but at the same moment, you look into the distance." (1) Hans Vandekerckhove does not carry a sketchbook, and never takes more than a handful of photographs when travelling, but he gathers impressions: the ideas that he will later, sometimes much later, express upon canvas in paint.

But even upon the canvas itself, the work goes slowly. The painter takes his time, and begins by applying rough and vague areas of colour. The white lines that define the outlines of figures and objects come next. And so it goes, a slow application of thin transparent layers. Sometimes, it takes up to eight layers before the painter finds the right colour. Thus the work evolves, from coarse to sophisticated, from hazy to sharply-defined, and from vagueness to clarity. Hans Vandekerckhove compares his paintings to "sharpening a pencil point". (2) The manner in which Hans

Vandekerckhove paints resembles a slow metamorphosis from chaos to order. It is almost an allegory of painting, an art form that endeavours to bring order to chaos.

Nevertheless, in Hans Vandekerckhove's paintings, the mystery only becomes more elusive as the contours sharpen. The mystery evoked by a silent and still, unfathomable and enigmatic world, one that is populated by self-absorbed figures, watching and thinking; figures that are alone, but not lonely. "Not portraits, but presences," as described by the painter.

They are solitary. Their happiness seems to consist of watching, endless watching. Is watching their *raison d'être*?

DEVELOPMENTS

Hans Vandekerckhove might stop time in his paintings, but his work – in style and composition – is subject to change.

After the Neo-Expressionism of the early 1980s, and the mathematical analytical period that followed, a turning point was reached in 1997. But there are also shifts and changes in his subsequent work. Initially, he works his paintings out very graphically: comprising robust stripes and veined surfaces, they are often reminiscent of woodcuts. His figures are sharply delineated, but barely possess any individual character traits: they are often little more than transparent shadows in a landscape that resembles a collage of large monochromatic surfaces and stains.

The figures that Hans Vandekerckhove positions within this symbolic, archetypal landscape are suggestive of the sculptures made by the British artist Antony Gormley. During the 1990s, Gormley used his own body to cast life-size human forms in iron. During his exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London (2007), he placed his lonely and solitary figures atop the neighbouring buildings. Four years earlier, he had gathered a crowd of hundreds of identical sculptures on the beach at De Panne as part of the art event Beaufort. Static. Facing the ever-surfing sea. With their backs against the built-up hinterland, they gazed towards the horizon and the endless emptiness.

Hans Vandekerckhove explicitly refers to Gormley in two paintings from 2014, both of which are called *Antony's Vision*. By the time he made these works, Vandekerckhove had long abandoned the depersonalized, archetypal, shadowy and spectral figure: the figure in *Antony's Vision* is individualised and can be recognised as an alter ego of the artist himself.

The template-like approach (as seen in the series of paintings and exhibition entitled *Stalking Hiëronymus*, 2002-03) has been superseded by greater pictorial refinement and detailing. The landscapes, which were previously monochrome shades of orange or blue, now contain greater variations in colour. The world seems to have become less hostile: the sometimes cold, desolate and barren landscapes rendered in icy blue or dull brown, with their post-apocalyptic aspects (a reference to Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* from 1979), have become more agreeable. In Hans Vandekerckhove's most recent work, nature is abundant and lush.

The near-lifeless figure, wrapped in blankets and searching for warmth, a comfort usually only obtained from a dog, is gone. But the mystery remains: the landscapes are still bathed in a deafening, albeit colourful, silence. The characters are almost always alone. Yet the artist called them, in an interview given in 2009, "more optimistic than depressed loners." (4)

GREENHOUSE

"The greenhouse was my first workshop," says Hans Vandekerckhove. (5) As a child, he spent a great deal of time in the company of Uncle Raf, his father's brother. The two men were very different: father Vandekerckhove was a portrait painter, an art connoisseur and intellectual. Vandekerckhove inherited his interest in philosophy from his father. Uncle Raf was the opposite: a horticulturist who only read the newspaper for the cycling races. But it was with Uncle Raf and his wife that Hans whiled away a great many months of his childhood: in the Lampetten, which lies between Ingelmunster and Meulebeke in rural West Flanders; a secluded, intimate world of farms, wells and greenhouses.

The death of Uncle Raf in 1997 – a year full of emotional events – had a Proustian effect on Hans: (6) he began painting the first gardens, his lost earthly paradise, from memory. Yet the symbolism of the greenhouse in Hans Vandekerckhove's oeuvre is a highly ambiguous theme, one that extends far beyond the simple notion of a warm cocoon and carefree childhood. *De kweekserre*

[The Propagation Greenhouse] (2001) depicts a rigid, impenetrable and unapproachable blue box. Immersed in glorious sunlight, it sits amidst an abundance of flowers, shrubs and trees. It is evocative of lost youth, as though

even the memory of this time is difficult, if not impossible, to recall. *Lampetten Revisited* (2005) is bathed in the same atmosphere. The painting is based on a family photograph from 1961 (7), which shows Vandekerckhove's father, Uncle Raf, and the young Hans standing next to a greenhouse. Yet the painting contains just one man, Hans' father. Hands in pockets, distant and seemingly uninterested in the greenhouse, he looks inside. As viewers, we can follow his gaze, at least in part: the door is ajar, but the greenhouse itself is mainly a reflection of the surrounding landscape. In this work, the greenhouse – as memory, as the proverbial Proustian Madeleine – refuses to yield its secrets. "I will pass and the village will last," wrote the poet Anton van Wilderode. In Hans Vandekerckhove's world, it is the greenhouse that endures, while childhood is irretrievably lost.

His most recent paintings are completely different. I would like to consider *Let's Break the Night with Color* and *José's Greenhouse* – both from 2014 – as a diptych. The first work depicts a greenhouse that rises like a lighthouse in the night, an illuminated beacon in the darkness. It seems strange not to find any plants or vegetables growing in the brightly lit glasshouse. Instead, the structure resembles a Mondrian-like puzzle of gleaming white, moss green and saffron yellow, as though a hotbed for paint and colours. In *José's Greenhouse*, a man – an alter ego of the painter – waits in an empty greenhouse, a space filled with nothing more than a few shelves and jars. Both the painter and the jars appear to be containers awaiting fulfilment and inspiration. My feeling is that this diptych is about the greenhouse as an incubator – the 'breeding ground' – of painting.

Hans Vandekerckhove has previously compared the greenhouse to a bay window: two structures that are both inside and outside, offering a vista and, at the same time, security. In short, a metaphor for the artist, his view of the world and his place within it. Vandekerckhove says: "Greenhouses are open houses that provide a maximum contact with the outside world and at the same time offer secure, fertile havens." (8)

The greenhouse – in the guise of a hut – also has a place within the twentieth-century philosophical tradition (9): two antithetical philosophers, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger, both had their 'huts' in the mountains. *The Philosopher's Greenhouse*, a pair of paintings from 2008, is similarly ambiguous. In one of the works, the door of an ornate, nineteenth-century cast-iron greenhouse stands open invitingly, but it would seem that the construction is otherwise empty. In the second painting, the greenhouse door is closed. There is something strange going on: the mountains and ravine in the background, painted in blue, are not reflected in the greenhouse, the glass of which is opaque; the panes only reflect the greenery within. The greenhouse is thus a cocoon, one that excludes the external world.

For Hans Vandekerckhove, the greenhouse is a metaphor for painting: it allows the outside world to permeate but, at the same time, at least in part, shuts it out. For the painter – sitting in his proverbial greenhouse – the outside world is an inspiration, but the inner world plays an equally important role. In his paintings, the external world is an interior world. And vice versa.

HORIZON

In 1997, Hans Vandekerckhove, to use his own words, discovered the horizon. (10) It was during a visit to the remarkable garden created by the British filmmaker Derek Jarman, who had died of AIDS three years previously. In the featureless landscape of Dungeness in rural Kent, England, near the controversial nuclear plant, Jarman had built a cheerful garden on the salty and barren soil, which lived on after his death. "I discovered the horizon there," says Hans Vandekerckhove. "It seems trivial, but for the artist in me, the horizontal line was an important revelation." (11)

From that moment onwards, Vandekerckhove became a serious walker. He not only hikes in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, but also the Spanish Pyrenees and the Ardennes. His journeys remain important sources of inspiration.

Walking opens new perspectives and unexpected panoramas. When it comes to hiking, the route is more important than the arrival, and getting lost is essential to exploring. Watching, observing, thinking and contemplating are fundamental activities that are only encouraged by walking.

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance by Robert M. Pirsig is an allegorical, metaphysical tale about being 'on the road' in the United States, a journey in which driving, walking, looking and thinking are on an equal footing: "Sometimes it's a little better to travel than to arrive." (12)

And as Rebecca Solnit writes in her introduction to *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*: "While walking, the body and the mind can work together, so that thinking becomes almost a physical, rhythmic act." She adds: "(...) past and present are brought together when you walk as the ancients did or relive some events in history or your own life by retracing its route." (13)

This does not detract from the fact that although Hans Vandekerckhove himself is a passionate walker, his figures are usually standing or sitting. They are contemplative, captivated and overawed, lost in thought or simply present in the moment. They often seem adrift within themselves. They are, and will forever remain, outsiders within an enchanting world.

The relationship between man and the landscape is complicated. As the Dutch philosopher Ton Lemaire has written, the pictorial landscape tradition that emerged during and after the Renaissance could only occur once man had separated himself from his environment and the landscape, and thus his permanent place in an ordered (religiously) and foreseeable world. "The awareness of space in the depiction of the landscape – including the drawing of maps and making of voyages (of discovery) – is thus a symptom of the reorientation of the modern man, but also his disorientation in his new universe." (14) Painting landscapes presupposes distance: the earliest landscapes were painted by city dwellers for other city dwellers.

Through his paintings, Hans Vandekerckhove anchors himself within the centuries-long tradition of landscape painting. Many have noticed correspondences with the work of the German Romantic painter, Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), and more specifically the lone *Rückenfigur*: a person seen from behind, contemplating the landscape or horizon. Yet the difference between Vandekerckhove and Friedrich could hardly be greater. There are, indeed, certain similarities: nature is a source of wonder and contemplation throughout Friedrich's oeuvre. The paintings depicting figures from behind, staring outwards at the natural world, are innumerable. Yet these works were not motivated by the fact nature is unknowable and unpredictable. In Friedrich's landscapes, every dab of paint exudes godliness. The figures in his paintings strive to understand nature because it is God's work and because – just as in the poem *Het Schrijverke* [The Writer] by Guido Gezelle – they wish to decipher the name of God in his creation. Friedrich usually lends a helping hand: his landscapes are neatly arranged and assembled as if he, himself, is God.

His figures gaze at the horizon because a better future dawns: the afterlife. Ships are people on the sea of life, the rock is faith, the pine tree is the pious soul (eternal green!), and the impenetrable fog is our earthly existence. But ultimately the sun – like a divine light – shines in perpetuity. While Friedrich was a superlative and often breathtakingly picturesque painter, he did not paint landscapes – as is generally assumed – but mirrors of his religious convictions.

Hans Vandekerckhove's landscapes are not religious rebuses. What they do offer, however, is an enchanted and enchanting world, a soothing glow of colour and paint, an enigmatic, ever-surprising sphere, one that is beheld by solitary figures in wonder and delight. Dispassionate. Satisfied.

MOUNTAIN

The mountain is a threshold: a transition between here and there, and between the earthly and the heavenly. Borders fascinate Hans Vandekerckhove. His work often plays with contrasts, such as inside and outside, open and closed, house and landscape.

"Mountains have been seen around the world as thresholds between this world and the next, as places where the spirit world comes close," writes Rebecca Solnit. (15) It is no coincidence that the mythical Shangri La, one of the earthly paradises, lies high in the mountains.

Hans Vandekerckhove was attracted to mountains long before he began to paint them in earnest. For three years, he searched for a greenhouse in the mountains. "Greenhouses and mountains are compatible because they both embody an alternative reality. A greenhouse in the mountains is thus an ideal location on the border of the sedentary and nomadic experience." (16)

In the series entitled *The Painter's House*, executed in 2014 and 2015, Hans Vandekerckhove painted a giant greenhouse in the mountains. The monumental scale of the structure is evident from the tiny figures in the foreground. The colossus assumes the archetypal form of a house: a remarkable glazed dwelling, with colourful stained-glass windows, a kind of kaleidoscope. This structure undoubtedly symbolises the art of painting: the chaos of colour that must prevail within the interior space.

Mountains have captured the imagination ever since the Italian poet Petrarch climbed Mont Ventoux in 1336, "just to enjoy the view". Ton Lemaire sees his ascent as representing the primordial break with ancient Christian Europe: the spirit of Petrarch is that of the expansive man, the man who wishes to discover 'the other'.

“Where else would man be able to discover real space than from a vantage point?” Lemaire writes. “Lost hikers search for an overview of their surroundings in order to orientate themselves. If the space is to unfold into landscape, then a wide perspective is needed. “(17) Lemaire also considers this figuratively: philosophy and perspective are both “encounters with the horizon of our existence”. (18) At the same time, the mountain is stamped with the hallmarks of immutability and eternity. It is quite different from the endlessly changing and moving sea, which – at least for now – does not appear in Hans Vandekerckhove’s work. Whenever he paints water, it is in the form of a stream, a pond or ornamental feature. It is always water that has been tamed and which functions, in his paintings, as a reflective surface. I will return to this later.

TREES

In his paintings of trees, the horizon is absent or only subtly present. These works are the fruit of nature walks: in Frahan near Bouillon, Gargilisse in central France and Lindisfarne, an island off the north coast of England. Trees, densely wooded areas and forests do not only symbolise time and eternity, but are imbued with a wealth of mythological connotations. Genesis stories and fertility cults linked to the forest even existed in ancient Athens and Rome, although the Romans derided the primitive Germans and their veneration of the Teutonic forest. Thus Arcadia was a wooded and rocky place in the eyes of Roman writers. And according to Virgil, the city was founded by the offspring of Rhea Silvia, goddess of forests. (19)

These considerations and nuances no longer apply to the work of Hans Vandekerckhove. It would seem that he simply enjoys painting forests and trees. He can hold his beloved moss, and revel in arabesques of stumps, undergrowth and rampant branches.

He occasionally allows the sun to illuminate the centre of the canvas, just as William Turner did. The British painter said, either on his deathbed or a few weeks before his death, depending on the source: “The sun is God.” (20) Light is everything – both for life on earth, and the painter.

The solitary walker or sentinel is almost always absent in Hans Vandekerckhove’s tree paintings. Some works are slightly threatening, and perhaps refer to the ‘Zone’, the abandoned and desolate wasteland in Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker* (1979). In earlier work – including the series *Stalking Hiëronymus* – the artist made several references to the ‘Zone’, a place rendered inaccessible by a (nuclear?) experiment, and where nature is left unchecked.

Hans Vandekerckhove also subtly refers to scenes from *Stalker* in his paintings entitled *Dweller on the Threshold*. Notice too, the word ‘threshold’: as an indication of a border and the reference to a song by Van Morrison. This is typical of Hans Vandekerckhove: titles are nods to songs and performers (*Lindisfarne, The Wall*), the music to which the artist listens while painting.

David Hockney (b. 1937) – one of Vandekerckhove’s favourite painters – has also made a remarkable number of landscapes and paintings of trees in recent years. For the Anglo-American painter they represent a return to his roots in northern England. It is thus the landscape of his youth – the rolling hills, fields, meadows and forests of Yorkshire – that he captures so recognisably.

Time plays a very different role in Hockney’s work. With Hans Vandekerckhove, an archetypal forest slowly takes shape on the canvas in the studio: a psychological landscape based on sensory experiences and, above all, the slow drip of memories. Hockney, in contrast, positions his easel in the field and immediately starts to paint. If the hawthorn blossoms, he wants to be there at the crack of dawn – almost like the impressionist painter Monet – in order to capture the morning light upon the white flowers. In a series of fifty-two paintings entitled *The Arrival of Spring in Wild Gate*, David Hockney has even created an almost day-by-day portrayal of the burgeoning spring.

ARCHITECTURE

Primarily modernist architecture has only appeared in the oeuvre of Hans Vandekerckhove since 2009. Could the Barcelona pavilion by the German architect Mies van der Rohe – built in 1929 and reconstructed between 1983 and 1986 – be considered as a type of greenhouse? It is undoubtedly the lightness of the pavilion that attracts Hans Vandekerckhove. ‘Light’ in the sense of ‘not serious’ – since Van der Rohe used narrow columns, allowing the construction to appear to float – and in the sense of ‘clear’ – because the building contains vast expanses of glass. The Barcelona pavilion is very open: as with a greenhouse, there is a fine boundary between inside and outside. The building is riddled with symmetry: split marble was used, which means that the patterns are often mirrored. There are also ponds around the pavilion, which provide the necessary reflections. Hans Vandekerckhove’s paintings often contain noticeably sharp silhouettes. Light and dark surfaces form stark contrasts. The perspective frequently diminishes. A human figure often brings a degree of ‘articulation’ to the austerity of the modernist

architecture. It is usually the painter's daughter, hence the title of the series: *Laura Maria Barcelona*. The lonely, observant figure who leads our gaze, on the one hand but who, on the other hand, is emphatically placed *in* the architecture: in such a way that the world is arranged *around* the figure. We are in the same position: we not only stand before the canvas as viewers, but can also identify with the human figure. We too are *in* a world. (21)

It is no coincidence the painting entitled *The Architect's House* (2009) contains an erect figure – in this case the alter ego of the artist – within a brightly-lit, yellow aperture. Night has fallen over the Mies van der Rohe pavilion, but inside – or at least on the threshold between inside and outside – a light still burns. This results in bands and planes of colour: white, pale green, light blue and yellow. Not shadows, but tightly defined areas of light. A man is silhouetted against an expanse of lemon yellow, and in him – actually within his heart – all the vanishing points converge. Outside and inside, architecture and man – they all coincide, that much is evident. In the architectural world, which is governed by sacred proportions, man is the measure of all things. When Hans Vandekerckhove paints buildings, his eye is always drawn to light and reflection – be it the Neue Nationalgalerie by Mies van der Rohe in Berlin, Peter Zumthor's thermal baths in Vals (1996), Switzerland or his Kolumba Museum (2007) in Cologne, the Punta della Dogana in Venice, or Tadao Ando's conversion of Francois Pinault's Contemporary Art Museum.

Figures sit and gaze out of the window. They are invariably positioned on the boundary between inside and outside. In each work, they are reflected several times throughout the space, and a total of four times in *Window on the East* (2015). The paintings thus seem to unfold, as though books or mirrors. The painting reflects itself and, as such, is an autonomous, self-contained and self-absorbed world.

In the series entitled *The Other Realm* (2013), Hans Vandekerckhove goes one step further. The man has disappeared and all we see is the play of light falling in shafts across the abandoned, orange spaces. As it was for Henri Matisse, orange is the colour of paradise. Hans Vandekerckhove describes it as "an abstract colour with a mystical aura." (22) In *The Other Realm*, the title of which also functions as a programme statement, the architecture – the floors and walls – provide an excuse to paint light. The physical structure delivers the planes, angles and perspectives. Without a surface, there can be no reflected light; the architecture thus makes light visible. Or is it simply that the light is visualised by the painter?

GARDEN

The Pool of Peace (2010-11), which depicts a water-filled crater south of Ypres, also offers up a large private space, like those seen in *Magda's World* (2009) and *Peter's Garden* (2013). These works depict contemporary versions of the *hortus conclusus*, the earthly paradise or the Garden of Eden: gardens of archetypal happiness and innocence lost, according to the church fathers. (23) It is no coincidence that a figure – again the painter – gazes into a circular pond in the work entitled *Haunts of Ancient Peace* (2010). The paradisiacal garden was, according to tradition, a perfect circle.

Nor is it a coincidence that the sunlit Gothic arches of the ruined abbey of San Galgano in Italy find an echo in the equally bright vegetation of *Magda's Tunnel*. And in *P & M's Place* (2014), we see the painter himself, sitting working, in the middle of a pool of sunlight, beneath a dome of branches, like a king beneath a colourful crown of budding canopies.

Each one of these works references the kind of private gardens and nature that offered sanctuary in an ideal world before the Fall of Man. The controllable and controlled garden is a fitting image for painting. Painting is also a quest to achieve balance between growth and timely pruning. There is no proliferation of vegetative forms in Hans Vandekerckhove's work, as with Pierre Bonnard. It is all about a nurturing, slow growth. The garden is – like the painting – cultivated. It is staked out, raked and pruned, but with paint and brushes both thick and fine.

VISITATION

Hans Vandekerckhove's most recent work is devoid of solitary figures. He portrays a man and a young woman upon monumental canvases. They are recognisable as the artist and his daughter, gathered around a bright lamp in the privacy of their home. She reads to him from a book. These are domestic scenes that evoke memories and echoes, and reveal the sediment of centuries of art history.

There are references to the not insignificant artistic subgenre of paintings that depict mothers teaching their children. In the past, Hans Vandekerckhove also painted this kind of work (24), but the tables have since been turned: it is the daughter who reads a book to her father.

At the same time, the works are reminiscent of the double portraits painted by Jan van Eyck, Frans Hals, Thomas Gainsborough and David Hockney. Hockney painted *My Parents* in 1977, the famous portrait depicting his aged father hunched over an art book, while his mother sits on the other side of a bookcase, staring fixedly ahead, hands idle in her lap. In centre of this meticulously detailed portrait there is not a lamp but a mirror, in which a reproduction of a painting by Piero della Francesca is reflected. This work is perhaps Hockney's way of saying: look, these are my roots, in both art and life.

Does something comparable take place in the work of Hans Vandekerckhove? Hans Vandekerckhove is an avid reader. He reads for an hour every day before he goes to work. But in this painting, he shows himself being read to, presumably from a book by one of his favourite writers, such as Thomas Mann, Samuel Beckett or Gerard Reve. The young woman appears before him – like an archangel – fertile with inspiration. The title of the series, *The Visitation*, is no accident.

In his latest paintings, it would seem that Hans Vandekerckhove is collating and condensing his sources and motives. It's the lifeline (father-daughter) and the artistic sediment (motifs from painting). There are circles and ellipses of light, an actual halo in which the two figures are enshrined, and through which their intimacy is enhanced. There are books and, not least, the paintings. Because hanging on the wall, subtly, are several works by the painter himself, one of which, coincidentally, features a greenhouse: *The Philosopher's Greenhouse*. The painter is surrounded by his artworks in the hermetic world of his home-studio. And there is the light, the ever-present light, so vital to both the artist and his art.

Peter Paul Rubens, no less, spent the final stages of his life in the countryside, in the castle of Elewijt, surrounded by his landscapes of the surrounding Brabant countryside. Rubens sat indoors and at the same time, travelled afield: his paintings offered him a virtual view of "his" world.

Something similar can be said of Hans Vandekerckhove. His latest works reveal the painting to be the perfect mental space. The world, art and personal history are captured in a painting, a house in which the painter can live and, above all, a home to which he can return once his travels are done.

The circle is complete.

Eric Rinckhout

ABOUT HANS VANDEKERCKHOVE

Dieter Roelstraete, *Hans Vandekerckhove: Stalking Hiëronymus* [with a foreword by Willy Van den Bussche] (Ostend - Otegem, PMMK - Deweer Art Gallery, 2003).

Friedl' Lesage, 'De ontdekking van de horizon', in: *Hans Vandekerckhove: My Head is my only Home* (Ghent, Ludion, 2007), pp. 7-17.

Dieter Roelstraete, 'Invalshoeken en toevalswegen: naar het werk van Hans Vandekerckhove', in: *Hans Vandekerckhove: My Head is my only Home* (Ghent, Ludion, 2007), pp. 19-49.

Steven Verschoore, 'Hans Vandekerckhove: "Schilderen is duizenden beslissingen nemen..."', in: *Isel*, No. 28, January-February 2009, pp.22-32.

Paul Depondt, 'Longing for an Inner world', in: *Hans Vandekerckhove: Picture Palace* (Tielt, Lannoo, 2009), pp. 14-115.

Paul Depondt, 'A la recherche de l'Arcadie perdue: Hans Vandekerckhove', in: *Septentrion*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2010), pp. 22-27.

Kristien Bonneure, *Hans Vandekerckhove. Let's Break the Night with Color* (Ronse, Light Cube Art Gallery, 2014).

OTHER SOURCES

David Hockney: A Bigger Picture (London, Royal Academy of Arts, 2012).

De uitvinding van het landschap. Van Patinir tot Rubens 1520-1650 (Antwerp, KMSKA, 2004).

James Hamilton, *Turner: a Life* (London, Sceptre, 1997).

Sarah Howgate & Barbara Stern Shapiro, *David Hockney. Portraits* (London, National Portrait Gallery, 2006).

Ton Lemaire, *Filosofie van het landschap* (Baarn, Ambo, 1970, 1996).

Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: an Inquiry into Values* (Toronto-New York-London, Bantam Books, 1974, 1976).

Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Amsterdam-Antwerp, Contact, 1995).
Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London-New York, Verso, 2001, 2002).

NOTES

1. Lesage, p. 17.
2. Verschoore, p. 32.
3. Bonneure, p. 6.
4. Verschoore, p. 31.
5. Lesage, p. 9.
6. *ibid.*, P. 11.
7. *Hans Vandekerckhove. My Head is my only Home*, p. 165.
8. Verschoore, p. 28.
9. Roelstraete (2007), p. 37 ff.
10. Verschoore, p. 31.
11. Lesage, p. 13.
12. Pirsig, p. 111.
13. Solnit, p. 15.
14. Lemaire, p. 31.
15. Solnit, p. 135.
16. Verschoore, p. 28.
17. Lemaire, pp. 14-15.
18. *ibid.*, P. 15.
19. Schama, p. 96-97.
20. Hamilton, p. 310.
21. Roelstraete (2007), p. 21.
22. Lesage, p. 13.
23. Depondt (2010), p. 24.
24. *Hans Vandekerckhove. Picture Palace*, pp. 88, 99 and 114.