

# KINGMA OPTS FOR A PAINTED ABSTRACTION OF REALITY



**It must be a pleasure to watch Lieuwe Kingma paint. He paints with both hands at the same time – what could be more exciting and daring? It is not possible to see him in action, because he works in the quiet atmosphere found in the attic of his home in Hilversum. Unpretentious and of few words, he assertively chooses his materials, colors, atmosphere, peaceful surroundings, and foremost – an intense concentration. In his atelier you can find (flower) still lifes, French, Spanish and Dutch landscapes, and from the last few years also nudes, usually within decorative interiors. Whether it be a nude or a landscape, every painting has to do with reality. Some of his subject matter actually exists, but most of it comes from his fantasy and imagination, inspired by impressions from days gone by. Kingma describes his landscapes as having been “filtered from the detail”. He realizes that it isn’t necessary to paint every single detail in a scene. In order to grasp the essence of a painting, one needs to leave some detail out. Kingma is a master at this.**

Having grown up on a farm in Friesland, it was not such a natural move to go from being a farmer’s son to choosing art as a profession. He did not grow up in a family that focused on art. Indeed, he is the only one from his family that went this direction. As a little boy he quickly stood out as being good at drawing. His high grades in drawing classes motivated him to take

things further. He was drafted into the military for a year, which interrupted his move from high school to the art academy. At the same time, however, this “break” gave him time to better prepare himself and to reflect. He applied and was selected at Kampen, Arnhem, and Groningen, but in the end he chose for Minerva Academy in Groningen, as he expected to get the best technical foundation from this school.

## REALITY AS A STARTING POINT

“To paint toward a perception, using reality as a starting point, in order to then stylize and make abstract.” This describes how Kingma has worked through the years. He studied color creation, practiced drawing models, drew on-site outside and learned how to analyze what can arise when one is in the process of making a painting. This eager-to-learn artist learned a great deal from professors such as Martin Tissing and Jan van Loon. He has always been inspired by colorful, abstract landscapes by Wim Oepts and Jan van Heel. Further inspiration comes from painters such as Nicolas de Stael, Amsterdam impressionist Breitner, and French landscape artist Vincent van Gogh. Kingma admires the step that Mondriaan made from figurative to abstract. He also enjoys the personality of the Otto de Kat still lifes and the bursting flower still lifes of Floris Verster.

At school Kingma was immediately attracted to painting with oil, and he spent most of his time at the academy working with this medium. More graphic techniques such as etching were too indirect for him, too slow a process, even though one can find a strong graphic line play that adds significantly to the quality of the very abstract Spanish landscapes he made much later. Kingma finished his studies in 1985. In 1991 he had his first exhibition, which was highly successful. Since then he has developed a long list of exhibitions. His work can now be found in large private and company collections. In 2001 he will have his first exhibition in the United States, in Philadelphia.

For a number of years he worked as an art teacher part-time along side his painting activities. Because of his growing success as a painter, he was able to leave teaching 3 years ago in order to focus full-time on his artwork. He moved from Northern Holland to Amsterdam, and now he lives and works in Hilversum.

## DIVERSITY, ESSENCE

His choice of where to live and work has nothing to do with the sort of landscapes that he often

paints. Even though he has Friesian background he does not see himself as focusing explicitly on Northern Holland landscapes, even though his appreciation for landscapes began there. "I enjoy making landscapes with the typical northern low horizons and expansive polders, but I am just as happy to do a wooded landscape, like a scene in Vondel Park. Each landscape has its own character and unruliness, which challenges me. It is much more interesting for me to be able to capture the essence, the atmosphere of a scene."

Kingma enjoys traveling in order to get impressions, and he has a huge reservoir of images in his mind that could keep him busy painting for years. It is fantasy that brings him through the process of creating a painting. It stands out that there are no people in his landscapes, yet one subtly realizes that each landscape has some trace of man having been there, be it a house, road, or simply a plowed field. He leaves people out of his landscapes in order to not create the beginnings of a story, as he wants all attention to be focused on the atmosphere of the scene itself. It is not only through the use of color that he achieves this. Kingma paints snow that has just fallen, or snow that is almost melted. Look at one of his snow landscapes for a while and you can almost hear the snow cracking as it packs under your feet. A warm, earth-toned Spanish landscape of his gives the feeling that it is indeed too warm to stay there very long. Maybe it is early in the afternoon. In Kingma's paintings you can feel whether it is morning or afternoon. Just as Monet knew how to paint a building at different moments in the day, Kingma can create landscapes that show you what time of day it is, and how the various seasons play with the atmosphere of a scene.

Those who have the chance to see a number of Kingma's paintings will note that the majority are landscapes, yet he is not content with being only a landscape painter. Through the years his series of landscapes, nudes, still lifes and interiors has grown, in both intimately small and monumentally large formats. What this shows is that Kingma has gotten more and more daring through the years. Above all one sees in his most recent flower still lifes that there are grand gestures. One can see large strokes of the pallet knife as well as fine strokes made with the brush. There is also a very visible physical play between the painter and the canvas. Kingma is left-handed. He paints with the brush using his left hand. With his right hand he paints with a broad piece of metal or a pallet knife. His right hand has had less practice, but it offers the same feeling and dynamic a painter needs.

Especially impressive is the texture one finds in his work, for example in his flower still lifes. There are parts of the canvas that are simply left bare, and other parts that have an unmixed creaminess of paint with a great deal of texture. The linen lives. Differently painted parts play their role. Daringly hard, unmixed thick layers of oil paint contrast with thin, glassy transparent colors. Sometimes there is a painting that "didn't work" under the layers of one that did. The texture of the first painting contributes to the quality of the one that is painted on top of it. Kingma experiences a struggle with each painting, but he feels that the end result must look like it was painted with ease and pleasure. The viewer must not end up with questions, but instead experience a new adventure in the painting each day.

## **FAUVIST, BUT ALSO AN ARTIST OF TODAY**

The extent to which Kingma paints from fantasy is particularly evident in his flower still lifes. Each vase with flowers is pontifically in the middle. The vase itself is usually almost too simple in design. This is exactly the challenge the painter wants – to make more of it than what it is. The vases develop an attractive reflection, and with touches of paint the fullness and volume are suggested. The background and the tablecloth seem to ignore the rules of perspective by not using diagonal lines. Kingma follows Matisse with bright oranges and blues. The viewer is led to experience the adventure of the painter, enjoying the atmosphere, harmony, and color. The end results are sometimes so festively colored that the title becomes a simple "White Bowl with Dry Flowers", "White Roses", or "Vase with Hydrangeas".

Whether we look at a nude or a landscape, we can see the same story of the process of painting itself. Only the subject itself changes. "I love the diversity offered by different subjects".

Kingma takes the liberty to use classical themes such as those used by painters past, and puts new life into them. He ignores modern trends, not allowing them to dictate what he as a painter today should paint and how. This is the basis for a painter who works with integrity. He does not see himself as a painter who needs to enter the race for the most avant-garde, but as one who carries on with a rich tradition.

*By Thea Figee  
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