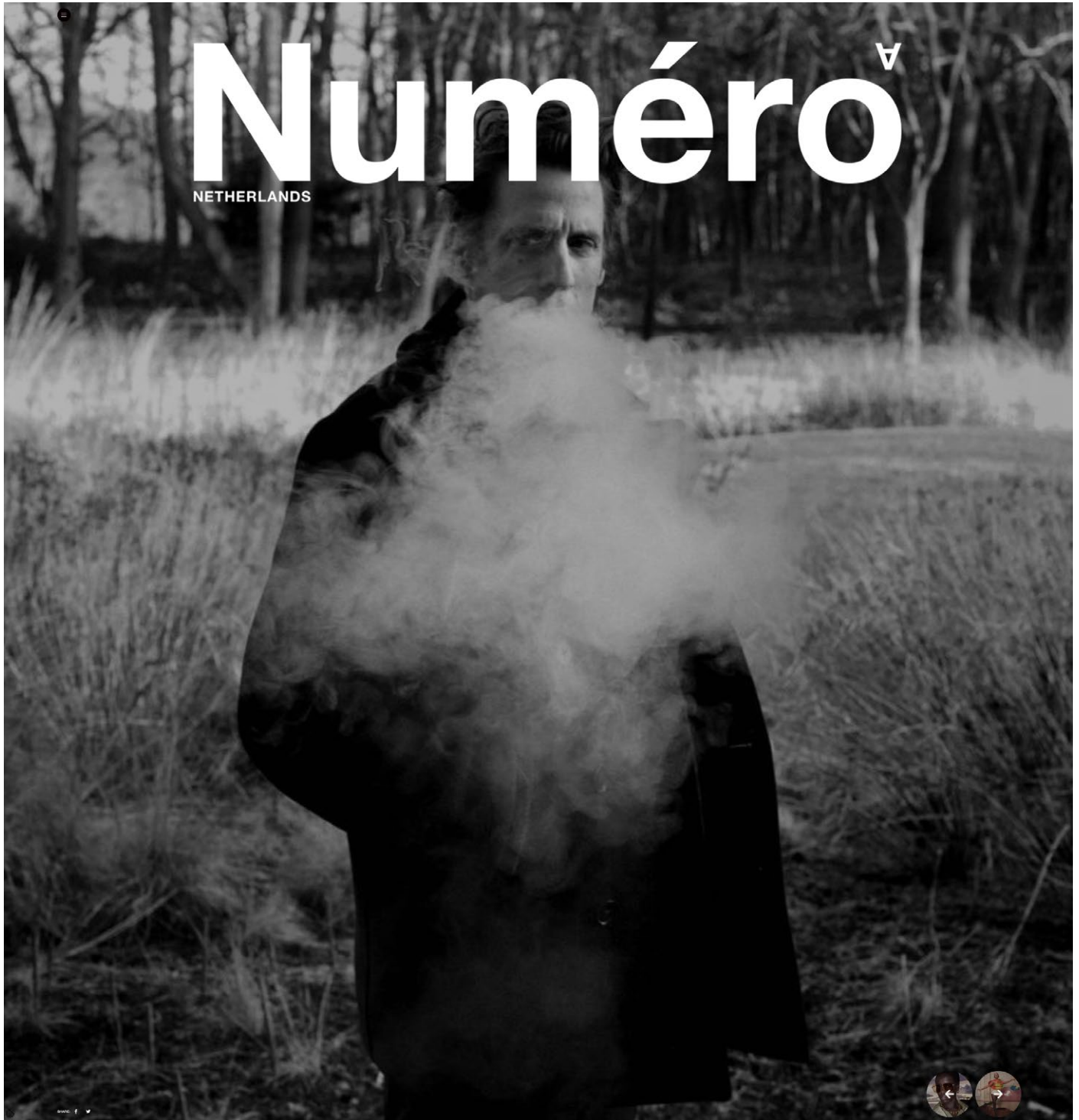


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Cesari, Marie-Pauline: *Rinus Van de Velde in conversation with Marie-Pauline Cesari*

17 February 2023



# IN CONVERSATION WITH RINUS VAN DE VELDE

February 17, 2023

Interview by Marie-Pauline Cesari

Portrait photography by Yaël Temminck

Rinus Van de Vede is an artist who likes to play by his own rules. Through diverse media ranging from drawings to sculptures, installations and film, he tells imaginary journeys and introduces his fictional autobiography. In “*The Armchair Voyager*” at Museum Voorlinden, the spectators are immersed in a parallel universe and discover the artist as the main character of his artworks, in the heart of exciting adventures, in the company of artists who have made history. He crafted an exclusive exhibition in which he plays with the museum’s collection, a generous mirroring, which makes the artist unique.



Photo by Yaël Temminck

**Your latest exhibition, “*The Armchair Voyager*”, is a metaphor for imaginary journeys. You’re telling through different mediums stories that only happened in your head. You are described as an explorer, but without having to leave your studio, why do you never leave it?**

When I started working 15 years ago, I found myself in my studio, behind four white walls, and I thought nothing was happening here (laughs). That’s when I got the idea to do a fictional autobiography. I started to invent a life that I never lived. It’s more comfortable for me but also quite fascinating to stay in my studio, explore my mind and create this fantasy, this parallel universe.

It is also a great human strength that we have, this capacity for daydreaming. We live today in a Fear Of Missing Out society, we feel compelled to go everywhere. I want to see this ability to daydream as a power, another way of exploring the world. It’s a fictional way, of course, but we all have fictions: we create fictions to understand the world. I think we should all create our own fictions

**Is making stories out of imaginary journeys also a way to escape the reality? To offer visitors an imaginary interlude and to take them away from their daily lives?**

My work is a reflection of reality without really participating in it. But it is closely related to the real world, because I don't want to do science fiction. For example, I created fictional conversations with artists like David Hockney, Pierre Bonnard, and Claude Monet. The conversations are fake, but the characters are real.

I wouldn't say it's an escape, I don't think it's a very interesting approach to escape from reality, but rather a tool to try and deal with the reality around you and try and structure it. I structure all the images that surround me by building a narrative and telling a story from those images.

**Since you relate your fictional autobiography in your exhibitions, aren't you afraid of losing your real identity through the one you have constructed?**

Not really (laughs). I don't believe in these fake autobiographies, I'm clearly aware that it's a lie. And in my opinion, it's even more interesting for the spectator to know that it's a fiction: I give some hints, in my drawings. For example, I built a jungle in my studio, and I pretended to be a nature scientist, but in the drawings, you will see the roof of my studio, and you will understand that it is a set. So, no, I won't lose my true identity through my work, I have friends and a beautiful family, and they help me to stay in reality.



Photo by Yaël Temminck

In “Inner Journeys”, you relate encounters with artists who have made history. Pierre Bonnard, Joseph Cornell, Joan Mitchell, Claude Monet, among others. If you could organize a dinner with a deceased artist, which one would you choose?

It's a tricky question because my answer may change tomorrow. But today, I would choose Philip Guston. He is an important painter for me because he also works in a very narrative way. He came from an abstract expression and all of a sudden, he changed his work and became cartoonish. I would probably ask him how he found the courage to make such a big change. But tomorrow it will be someone else! I like the diversity of art. That is also what I am trying to show here: I work with the museum's collection by establishing a conversation between my work and the current collection.



Photo by Yaël Temminck

**Are these artists in your work your inspiration? Is representing them a way of paying tribute to them?**

They are artists I respect a lot and from whom I draw inspiration. But it's also a manifestation of a desire to talk to them in a fictional world rather than in real life. Sometimes conversations in real life can be disappointing because they can be very quick, but in my work, I can go much further. If you take David Hockney as an example, rather than smoking a cigarette with him and having a small conversation, which I would be honored to do, in my work I can pretend that I live with him and imagine that we are close friends, who also argue sometimes. It's a completely imaginary world that you can invent!

**How do you express these conversations between your own work and the collection of the museum?**

I establish a narrative connection. This is not particularly related to art history or research, it is not even about curating an exhibition, it is more spontaneous. It's a generous way of showing the works without hierarchizing them: putting everything on the same level, because there are no masterpieces or pieces of lesser importance.



A summer at Giverny (2020) and Pond (2020) Courtesy of Museum Voorlinden



**You master all disciplines, from drawing to charcoal, including photography and sculpture. Which technique do you think is the most appropriate to tell a story and create the illusion that it is real?**

I consider myself a draftsman, the core of my work is drawing. It all started with drawing. But there are also many other mediums, such as ceramics, that tell a story, as well as the props and scenery that we make. However, as this is the most common medium, I would say that film is the best approach to tell a story.

Today, we no longer go to the cinema once a week, we watch a film on Netflix every night. This new accessibility makes films very understandable, for all ages. Cinema has developed our personality; it is a window to another world. We are very sensitive when we see a film on television: we can be scared when we see a horror film, but we are never scared when we see a drawing, at least not as much as a film.

Each medium has its own strength. My aim in my new exhibition is to link all these different mediums, and I am very happy that there is so much space in this beautiful museum, and that I can bring all these different approaches together in a story.

**You build realistic decors, which give us the impression of being on the set, ready to hear “Action”. You also make films. Have you ever thought of making a film for the cinema and if you had to produce a film, would you be the main character, like in your exhibitions?**

I’ve thought about it and talked to some directors, but the mainstream film process is too long for me and too hierarchical. When I make films for my work, everything is done in my studio, with a small team. It’s like working with your family in a Do-It-Yourself approach because we do everything by hand, every little detail.

I’m also the main character in my films, and I’ve found a way to play in it while I’m behind the camera: my assistant wears a latex mask of me, so I can look at myself while I’m shooting. I’m not interested in writing a script either; to be honest, I find it really boring (laughs) because I don’t want to know the ending before I do it. I prefer working in a more organic way and let the story progress during the shooting.

**We are a cultural magazine; we love art, and we try to promote artists we admire, like you. But we are also a fashion magazine. Do you have any fashion inspiration, and have you ever thought about a fashion designer in your imaginary travel?**

Not yet but I have always been curious about fashion world. I worked with Willy Vanderperre, a fashion photographer and Olivier Rizzo, the Belgian stylist. They collected my work and invited me to do some fashion shoots and so I was a model for a Dior campaign. I was curious and wondering how a fashion shoot worked, I learnt a lot. But I think I'm getting older to do modeling now (laughs). But about designing clothes, we are already doing it for our movies, I design costumes as I would do a sculpture.



Photo by Yaël Temminck

**Could fashion be a medium you could explore?**

Yes, of course, and I think the Dior collection made by Raf Simons and Sterling Ruby is a great demonstration of how fashion is linked to art. I bought a jacket from that collection, but I will never wear it, I prefer to exhibit it, as a sculpture.

The fashion industry, like cinema, has its own rules, and as I don't know enough about it, I prefer to use my own rules. I am showing some of the clothes we made for the films in my exhibition.

***The Armchair Voyager.*** Wassenaar: Museum Voorlinden, 11 February – 29 May 2023