

Rinus Van de Velde
Inner Travels



Rinus Van de Velde
These long, exhausting, inner travels ...
2021
Oil pastel on paper
110.2 × 73.2 cm
Private collection, The Netherlands
Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

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YET SOMEONE WOULD, NO DOUBT, AT-
TEMPT TO REPEAT OUR JOURNEY, SOONER
OR LATER. THIS THOUGHT MADE ME
ME FEEL WE SHOULD BE AT ONCE VERY
CAREFUL AND VERY DARING. CAREFUL NOT
TO MAKE A MISTAKE THAT WOULD RENDER THE
REPETITION IMPOSSIBLE. DARING, SO THAT THE JOURNEY
WOULD BE WORTH REPEATING, LIKE AN ADVENTURE.

Rinus Van de Velde
Yet someone would ...
2021
Oil pastel on paper
110.4 × 73.1 cm
Collection Kristof Vande Walle and Danaé Bosman, Antwerp
Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp



Rinus Van de Velde
Prop, Train
2021
Cardboard, paint, wood and mixed media
1050 × 250 × 300 cm
Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp





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The EUROPALIA Trains & Tracks multidisciplinary arts festival presents a programme of more than 70 events dedicated to trains. It explores the often-underestimated impact of the train on society via the work of a variety of artists. The invention of the railway in the 19th century overhauled concepts of time, distance and space, with trains catapulting society into the modern age. Today, once again, trains are playing an important role in the context of climate change and its associated challenges, and in people's growing desire to switch to a slower and more conscious way of travelling. Since its earliest days, the train has been a symbol of travel, of all kinds—whether a daily commute, mythical journey or imaginary voyage. The festival celebrates all of the above.

Rinus Van de Velde's work, in which the train is sometimes used as a motif, is created through the artist's imaginary, inner travels. Travels during which he meets countless artists, giving rise to new chapters of a fictional autobiography, which he develops in charcoal or pastel drawings, ceramics, photography and film. EUROPALIA is delighted to collaborate with Rinus Van de Velde, giving him the opportunity to share his inner travels. The resulting exhibition and catalogue, *Rinus Van de Velde—Inner Travels*, explores the artist's work in all its diversity. For the first time, the work of Van de Velde's many fictional travel companions, including Pierre Bonnard, Joan Mitchell, Claude Monet, Laure Prouvost, Jean Tinguely, Josephine Troller and Laurie Simmons, is shown alongside his own. The exhibition is supplemented by a unique performance programme, featuring Dolores and Charlotte Bouckaert, Monster Chetwynd, Rita Hoofwijk, Damien Petitot and Gaëtan Rusquet. They all add a broader dimension to the themes of travel and encounters with others.

We are very grateful to Rinus Van de Velde for this fascinating, enjoyable and open collaboration. Likewise, we wish to thank all the other participating artists as well as the many lenders who were happy to loan their works. Our thanks also to Tim Van Laere Gallery for professional support and Bozar, which is hosting the exhibition.

Our gratitude goes to our subsidising bodies and sponsors, without whom this project would not have been possible.

Finally, we also wish to express our thanks to the authors of this book. A book that, instead of being merely an exhibition catalogue, has become a separate publication, shedding new light on the artist's practice.

We hope you enjoy visiting the exhibition and reading this book.

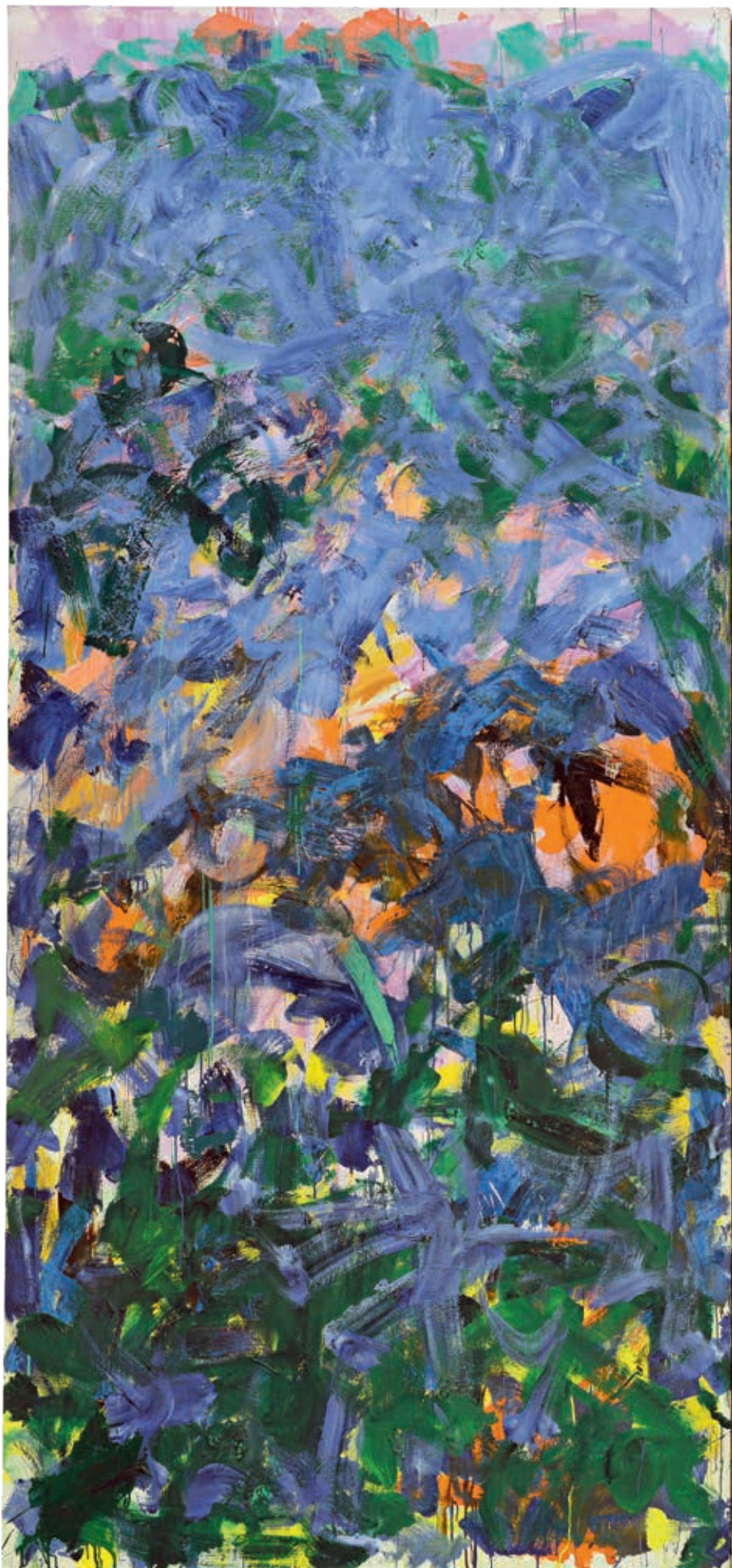


Rinus Van de Velde
I am the armchair voyager
2020
Charcoal on canvas, artist's frame
246 × 161 cm
Private collection, Germany
Courtesy König Galerie, Berlin



Claude Monet
La pointe du Cap Martin
1884
Oil on canvas
65 × 81 cm
Collection Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Tournai





Joan Mitchell
La Grande Vallée XVII, Carl
1983–1984
Oil on canvas
280 × 260 cm
Collection Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
Inv. 84.082



In 1994, 11-year-old Rinus Van de Velde travelled to the United States with his parents to visit the Grand Canyon. Many teenagers dream of exploring this imposing and magnificent natural wonder. Except that Rinus, upon arriving at the canyon, after an intercontinental flight and hours driving through the desert, refused to get out of the car. Today, he says that he only knows the Grand Canyon because of David Hockney, who has ‘made some stunning paintings of it’¹ and with whom he embarked on an imaginary journey to the canyon. If the young Van de Velde had got out of the car that day, his visualisation of the Grand Canyon would have ended right there and then; while the physical journey has an end point, the mental journey is never-ending.

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Van de Velde’s artistic practice starts from this mental journey, which also explains why his EUROPALIA exhibition is called *Rinus Van de Velde: Inner Travels*. In essence, the exhibition is a journey through the artist’s universe, where he encounters for the first time the work of artists who inspire him; each serves as his alter ego in the fictional autobiography that he is building through his work. This text is also a journey through Van de Velde’s oeuvre, starting with a drawing from 2011 and exploring the roads that led to the film *La Ruta Natural*, made ten years later, which will have its premiere at the exhibition.

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Try leaving behind the realm of your imagination and it will haunt you like a ghost ... (2011) is one of a handful of early works in the exhibition. It is a large, monochrome, charcoal drawing with an accompanying text written beneath it: Van de Velde’s trademark, with which he achieved fame. But the subject, a fox—or a wild animal in general—seems at first glance to be foreign to his work. And the dominant blank wall is in stark contrast with the recurring *horror vacui* of his other large black and white works. The drawing—which was created at the end of his post-graduate degree at HISK (Higher Institute of Fine Arts, Ghent) and at the beginning of his rapid rise to success—provides an insight into his way of working and the doubts that the young artist had to overcome. An early, compact version of his later oeuvre.

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The image of the stealthy fox out for a walk is reminiscent of Leoš Janáček’s opera *The Cunning Little Vixen*, which premiered in 1924. But beyond the obvious iconographic similarity, there is another correspondence. The Czech composer adapted his libretto from an existing cartoon strip, adding to it, transforming the plot into scenes that are not set within a specific time or place, blending fiction with reality.² Van de Velde composes his works in much the same way: he is inspired by existing images

1 Quote from a filmed interview in August 2021 for EUROPALIA. This essay draws partly on elements from this interview and on written exchanges between the artist and the author in December 2021.

2 Janáček based his libretto on *Liška Bystrouška* by Rudolf Těsnohlídek, a serialised comic strip published in 1920 in the Brno newspaper, with illustrations by Stanislav Lolek. In 1921, it was published as a novel.



Rinus Van de Velde
I'll stay in the car, David ...
Coloured pencil on paper
26.6 x 30.5 cm
Private collection, Belgium
Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp





Rinus Van de Velde
Try leaving behind the realm of your imagination and it will haunt you like a ghost ...
2011
Charcoal on paper
200 x 200 cm
Tim Van Laere Collection, Antwerp
Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

and text, telling stories through drawings and later also ceramics, installations, photos and film scenes, without an exact time or location. Fact and imagination are always blended.

While Van de Velde was inspired by the fox that runs loose in London's National Portrait Gallery in Francis Alÿs's video *The Nightwatch* (2004), he never sought to create connections with or preserve the context of that particular work. It is an image which is a mere visual trigger for the artist, to which he adds completely different layers of meaning. The smudged wall resembles a work by the American painter Mark Rothko. Van de Velde pretends here to be an abstract expressionist, whose work is based loosely on that of the American; this is confirmed by (among other things) the title "*untitled # 0*" [sic] and the year 1952 to which he refers in the accompanying text. This reads as follows:

Working on my until now unexhibited monochrome "untitled # 0" was an excruciating experience that lasted more than two bitter cold December months in 1952. I was looking to get rid of any worldly and personal influences in my work, and aimed for a pure, flat presence. But the longer I worked on this painting, the more it seemed to be moving, coming to life, breathing like a human chest. And then the last day, as in a daydream or vision, the low right corner of the canvas suddenly seemed to be folding outward, and out of the white surface appeared a smudgy, diagonally orientated wall, along which a fox was wandering. And I could tell it was grinning at me, this animal, this diabolic materialisation of figurative deception. I mean: try leaving behind the realm of your imagination and it will haunt you like a ghost.

Unlike the other texts beneath his large charcoal drawings, this one is much longer and tells a story in itself, blending fiction with reality. This is just one of the many alter egos that Van de Velde assumes. He prefers famous figures in art history, whose practice is far removed from his: an abstract expressionist like Rothko (versus Van de Velde who is a figurative artist) or a pleinairist like Claude Monet (vs Van de Velde, the studio artist). This identification with an antipode creates a tension in his work, confusing the observer. In the 2011 drawing, Van de Velde also expresses his fascination with abstract expressionism, which—later on—includes the work of artists such as Joan Mitchell, which is very different from

his own visual language. But does he also express his own insecurity as an artist who is just starting out? In this instance, he elevates the 'inferior' drawing to the level of painting, because of its subject (abstract expressionism) and the support he uses (a large canvas). He also justifies his own preference for figurative art, something that was less evident then than it is today. The fox symbolises figuration and imagination, which, like Janáček's cunning little vixen, refuse and are unable to be tamed.

As such, this piece provides an insight into a way of working that has remained largely unchanged to this day, even though Van de Velde has expanded his media. Every day he heads to his studio, where he starts with a blank canvas, a sheet of paper or a ball of clay, and sees where his daydreams and imaginary travels lead him—seeing, often, through the eyes of other artists. This is the starting point of any given day and of the exhibition, which features work by Monet and Mitchell, as well as Pierre Bonnard, Edvard Munch and a unique series of outsider artists such as Henri Rousseau, Joseph Yoakum and Josephine Troller. Their work is the outcome of a physical journey, painted on location or from memory; or of an imaginary journey, as in the case of the outsiders. Van de Velde takes an anthropophagic—as in Oswald de Andrade's definition—approach to their work, to take his own fantasy to the next level. He also reads their (auto)biographies, based on his conviction that an oeuvre needs narrative and structure to take on depth and meaning. In the same vein, his own fictional autobiography ties together his own oeuvre, which is simultaneously created and supplemented with new fragments—these days, in different media.

For 15 years, starting when he was a student, Van de Velde's work consisted of drawings, in which the logic of the fictional autobiography spurred him to gradually add more and more self-portraits. He then began to alternate the drawings with ceramic works: miniature worlds teeming with figures that added 3D scenes to the autobiography, which he had extracted from the (auto)biographies of such artists as Joseph Beuys and modelled—in every sense of the word—to his own intentions. In 2013, he also began to build huge sets in his workshop and photographed himself within them, as inspiration for a new episode—in drawings again—of his autobiography. Later, the installations became separate works within his oeuvre; 3D cosmoes derived from his imaginary travels, daydreams and artistic dialogues. He then used them as props in the films *The Villagers* (2017–19) and

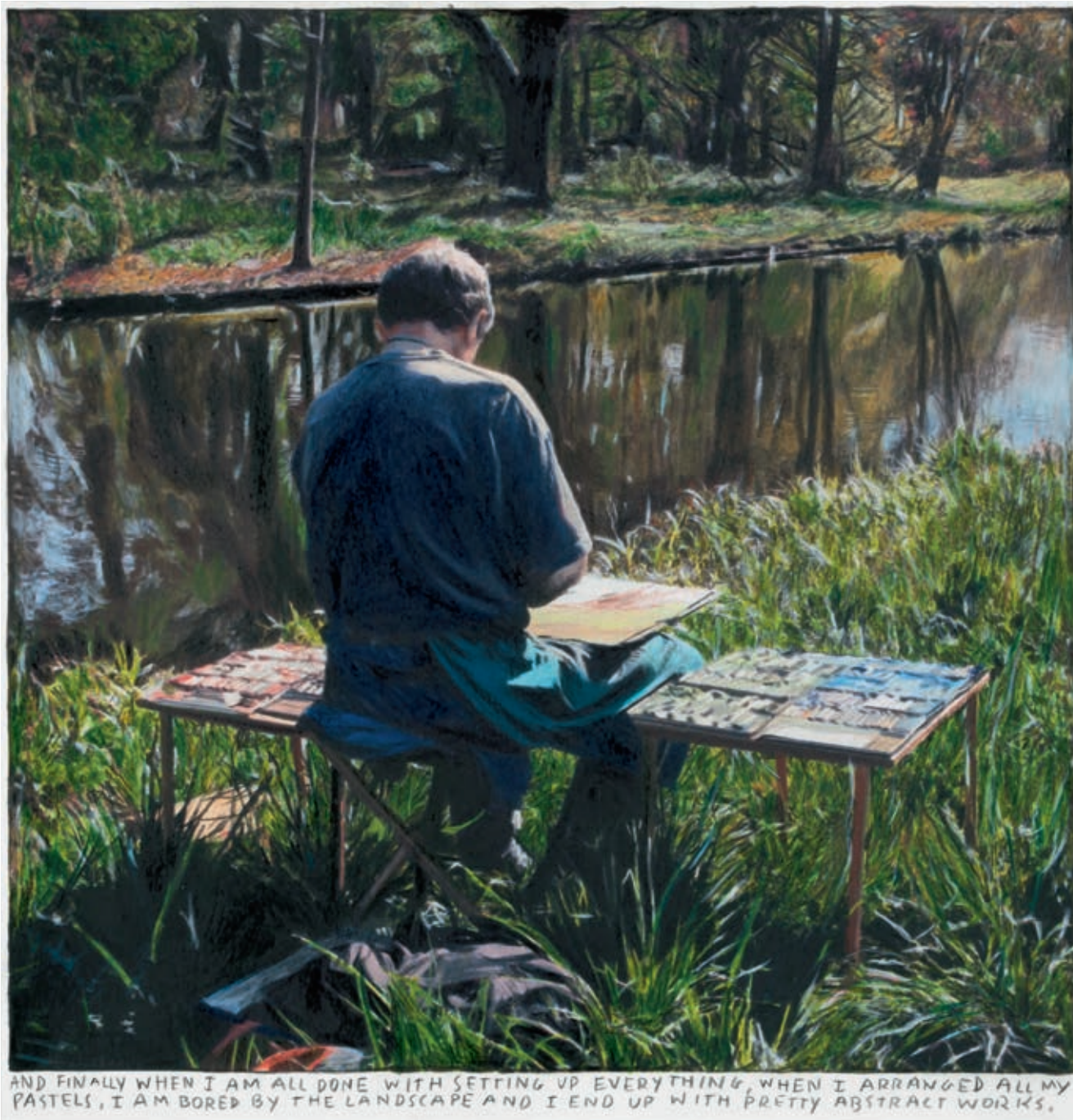


Rinus Van de Velde
Where clouds become sculptures and a dog talks philosophy
 2015
 Mixed media, boat, table
 197 x 453 x 128 cm
 Collection Bernadette Roothoof and Wilfried Hoet, Belgium
 Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp





Rinus Van de Velde
And when I finally fell asleep ...
2018
Coloured pencil on paper
11.1 × 20.8 cm
Private collection, Belgium
Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp



AND FINALLY WHEN I AM ALL DONE WITH SETTING UP EVERYTHING, WHEN I ARRANGED ALL MY PASTELS, I AM BORED BY THE LANDSCAPE AND I END UP WITH PRETTY ABSTRACT WORKS.

Rinus Van de Velde
And finally when I am all done with setting up everything ...
2019
Coloured pencil on paper
27 × 26.2 cm
Private collection, Belgium
Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp



Josephine Troller
Verzauberung
1970
Oil on canvas
65 × 100 cm
Private collection, Solothurn



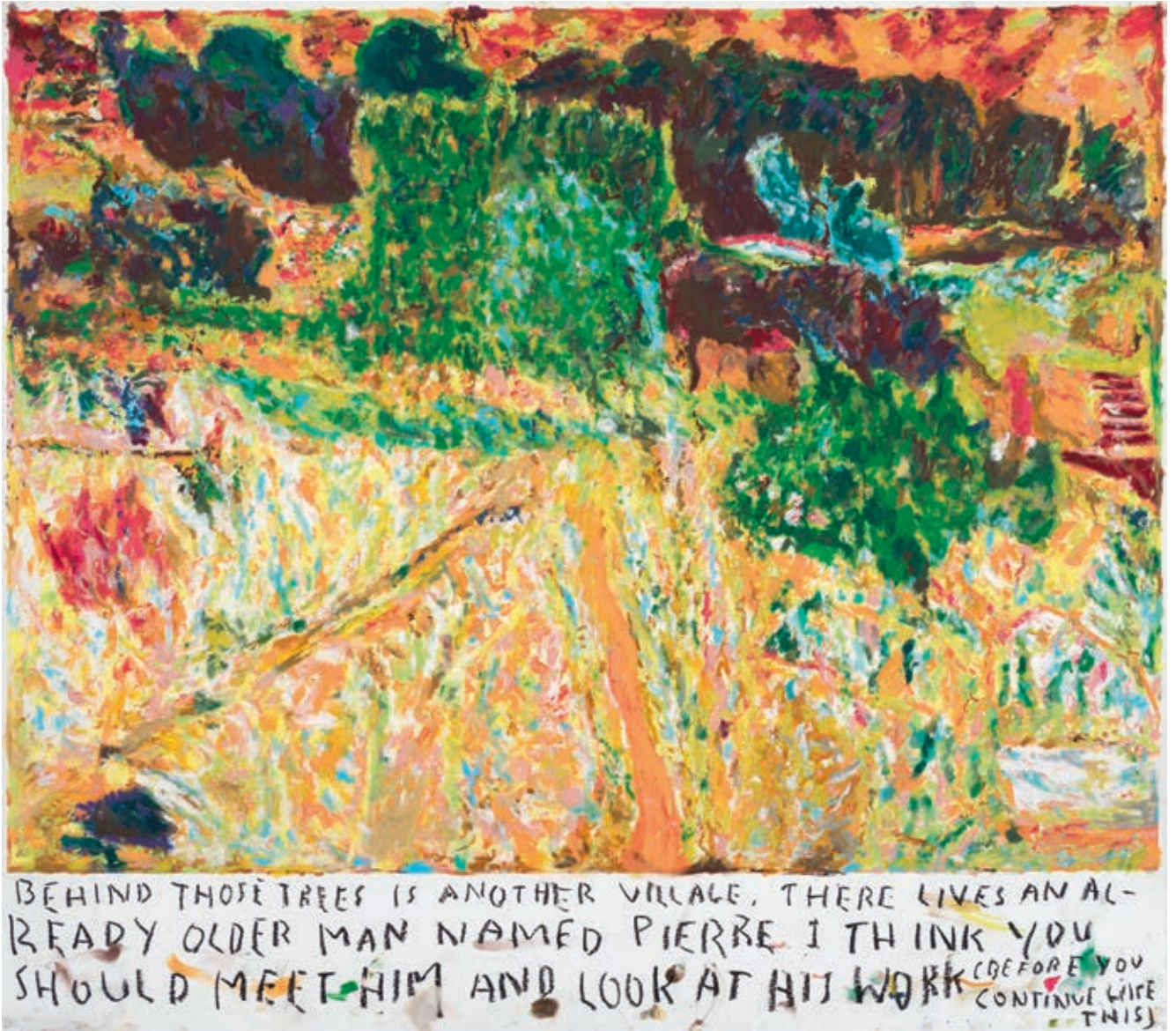


Josephine Troller
Garten Eden
1963–1964
Oil on canvas
80 × 130 cm
Kunstmuseum Luzern





Rinus Van de Velde
It's only charming ...
2019
Coloured pencil on paper
30 x 25.1 cm
Collection Simon Devolder, Brussels
Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp



Rinus Van de Velde
Behind those trees is another village ...
2020
Oil pastel on paper
72.3 × 81.6 cm
Private collection, Sint-Truiden
Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp



Pierre Bonnard
Maison du peintre au Cannet
c. 1942
Oil, gouache and watercolour on paper laid down on cardboard
40.8 × 32.9 cm
Bailly Geneva-Paris



Pierre Bonnard (Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1867–Le Cannet, 1947)
Beau temps orageux
1910–1911
Oil on canvas
38 × 71 cm
Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne
Bequest of Henri-Auguste Widmer, 1936
Inv. 298

