

## **Stijn Huijts, Director of the Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht**

For more than twenty years, Aline Thomassen has been fascinated by the psychological landscape that Morocco represents for her, a landscape that she identifies as if it were in her own DNA. The fact that she spends several months a year living and working there means that she has been able to immerse herself as a person and an artist in Moroccan society and so discover that the topics of her artistic work surface more overtly there. Over the years, there has been a visible shift that runs parallel to the change of position Thomassen underwent, as she turned gradually from a relative outsider to an almost insider. The sociologically-oriented interest in various aspects of Moroccan culture, and specifically the female figure within it, made way over time for a more psychological orientation. She deals with universal existentialist issues, inspired by various cultural and psychological realities displayed in society. In her solo exhibition, Thomassen adds a new chapter to a steadily growing visual epic that is still driven by her experiences in Morocco.

Forty men's portraits are accompanied by several monumental portraits of women, which - typically of Thomassen - are terrifyingly beautiful. Terrifyingly, because the women she depicts look - without exception - as if they have undergone intense experiences. With pride and self-assurance, they show the viewer not only their femininity, but also their wounds and scars, in a way that hides nothing. With not a shred of embarrassment about their physicality or their suffering and pain, they appear to be driven by human drama. Thomassen's skilled painter's hand has succeeded in capturing this drama in images. Just as the depicted women's self-esteem appears to be fuelled by deep human impulses and intuition, the artist's hand appears to be driven by an inner necessity that shies away from any preconceived rational decision. The pictures thus produced are of a relentless beauty, precisely because here outward appearance is inextricably linked to the inner essence. Outward beauty on its own is naked, but in combination with truth it is relentless.

All becomes clear if we regard the female figures as the expression of the underlying psychological landscape that Morocco represents to Thomassen and with which she feels such affinity. It is the psychological landscape in which all sorts of existential aspects of humanity, such as suffering, despair, elation, illness and death are clearly present and are not smoothed over or covered up as in our over-organized Western society. She is fascinated by the way in which women in Moroccan culture deal with these existential dilemmas, how they show their feelings in daily life (also in their physical consequences) and how they deal with the moral pressure that society undeniably puts on them.

Aline Thomassen offers the viewer her images of people as vehicles for reflection on the conditions of our existence. And even though she makes no attempt to disguise her personal fascinations, she does not want to force anything on the viewer or take sides or moralize. See it as an attempt to expose things, raise questions and create scope for articulating human doubts and insecurities. I'd like to second that. Forget this text, clear your mind and look.