

I travel in your soul, Stijn Huijts, Bonnefantenmuseum

A 'visual correspondent' is how Aline Thomassen described herself during the 'I travel in your head' project – and that is what she was for three months in Morocco, sending back a drawing a day over the Internet, together with appropriate fragments of sound provided by musician Lázaro Tejedor. People back home could look forward to a series of daily 'visual columns' which together formed an artistic 'travel blog'.

However, the journalistic qualities of Aline Thomassen's work involve more than just visual reporting. Rather than the artist, it is the works of art that act as correspondents – something equally apparent from other aspects of Thomassen's work besides her recent Moroccan weblog. Her paintings and drawings appear to be vehicles for ideas, thoughts, feelings, experiences and memories that dwell deep within the subconscious, whose powerful influence seems to establish communication between the viewer and a realm beyond the reach of words. This is almost *écriture automatique*, as though some invisible force were guiding the artist's hand – straight from the heart, without involving reason, which at times even appears to have been temporarily switched off, or at least to have played a purely subordinate role.

Yet Aline Thomassen still has an unmistakably personal signature, and her work generally displays features that make it instantly identifiable as hers. Her mastery of the medium and the faultless tailoring of her brushwork to her subject have the hallmark of the virtuoso. Again and again, the fluidity of touch and the flawless interplay of arabesques in 'I travel in your head' allow her to conjure up a unique sense of North Africa with just a few lines and dabs of paint. Such virtuosity inevitably calls to mind the magnificent way in which Chinese calligraphers set their characters down on paper, in a seemingly casual, natural process that is in fact above all the fruit of talent and endless practice. Thomassen is clearly fascinated by the visual wealth of day-to-day existence in Morocco, the symbiotic blend of beauty and rawness in which Arab women – whom she so deeply admires – live out their lives. Committed to paper, this fascination produces an impressive series of 'flaming creatures'. Women's bodies and animal and plant motifs flow together to create an almost cosmic link with a blend of mysterious visual elements which may or may not be recognisable.

The content of the work suggests memories of personal incidents that well up from the depths of the soul, with recurring elements that

appear autobiographical. Yet this is not mere ego-trippery. The artist's recontextualisation of her personal experiences in the world of Moroccan women gives the autobiographical elements a wider validity. Through the process of depiction, personal experiences are thus translated into more universal existential issues. Aline Thomassen's great achievement is to have struck a balance between form and content that gives both reason and emotion just the right amount of space in the artistic process, so that she eventually manages to travel in our souls as well as in our heads.