

## **Yasmijn Jarram, All About Drawing, Stedelijk Museum Schiedam**

Ever since she travelled to Morocco for the first time, in 1994, Aline Thomassen has been intrigued by Arab women. She speaks the language now, and lives alternately in Morocco and the Netherlands.

She makes organic drawings and watercolors, sometimes several meters high. Usually one single woman is the central subject, done in simple lines against a white background, but nevertheless evoking a whole world of emotions. Her body plays an important role: not just as a sign of femininity, but more particularly as an instrument of expression and as a carrier of a mental reality.

The mythical women Thomassen depicts are mothers, lovers, warriors—but above all, autonomous personalities. They look strong and self-assured, but at the same time vulnerable, mysterious and sensuous, due to the technique used. This element of paradox is omnipresent in Thomassen's work. A tall woman, clasping a small figure in her arms like a mother gorilla, while clutching hands appear from behind her back. Is the child being protected or oppressed? Good and evil exist side by side. Sometimes Thomassen adds taboo-breaking texts to her drawings, but also exposes secrets in her pictures: an unborn baby in a womb, brains that are elegantly squirming out of an open skull or babies that are connected with the inside of a woman by means that look like umbilical cords. Some women almost collapse under the load of many children, others present a man with their intestines, looking unmoved but pugnacious. Here and there the central figures are flanked by floating eyes that keep a close watch on everything. In order to let an invisible dimension shine through, literally, from behind the background, Thomassen sometimes makes holes in the female body on paper.

Her work betrays a sincere fascination and admiration for Arab women. True, there is friction under the surface, but that surface is enchanting because of its light, colour and warmth. In conclusion, the portraits may be called crude and elegant at the same time, just like the women themselves and possibly the entire Arab culture.