



René Daniëls, Untitled (ill, free and camera crew), 1985-1987. Long term loan Stichting René Daniëls. Photo Peter Cox.

title	'Shutters'
episode	Plug In #43
duration	from 4/10/2008
guest curator	Dominic van den Boogerd
text by	Dominic van den Boogerd
photographer	Peter Cox

'Shutters' brings together several paintings and drawings by René Daniëls from 1985 to 1987, most of which have never been exhibited before. Many of the works in this exhibition have the exhibition itself as their theme. The recurrent motif is a perspectival representation of a three-walled room with paintings, but we also recognise window shutters, a television set and a diaphragm. Daniëls explores the mysterious borderland between image and idea. The essence of art, he says, is what goes on inside your head, 'the darkroom of painting'.

'Memoirs of a Forgetful One' (1986) appears to represent the imperfection of recollection, the inadequacy of the memory to recreate exactly what the eye has seen. The white surfaces could be the paintings, the yellow their after-images, the impressions they leave behind. The

two do not correspond. There are gaps between what is shown and what we think we have seen.

In 'Floor for a Painting' (c. 1987), the exhibition rooms swarm in all directions like black bow ties. The title refers to 'Wall for a Painting, Floor for a Sculpture', a 1987 exhibition in De Appel in which Daniëls participated. The architects Paul and Hilde Robbrecht had used rudimentary interventions to gear the space to the theme of the exhibition: the architectural conditions for an ideal presentation of paintings and sculptures. In the 1980s, when spectacular museum buildings sprung up like mushrooms, the relationship between art and architecture was a controversial subject. Daniëls, however, is less interested in the wall or the floor and more in the exhibition itself. In the companion piece for this work, 'Untitled' (c. 1987), the rooms are painted over with a white layer, so that they almost completely blend into the background. Painting something means that something painted earlier is covered over. Daniëls points to the relationship between visualisation and obfuscation. For every secret that is revealed, another is concealed.

'The Dark Room' (1986) unites opposites such as inside and outside, foreground and background, day and night. The title can refer to the photographer's darkroom but also the camera obscura. For centuries, it is known that when light passes through a small opening into a dark room, a reversed image of the outside world appears on the wall opposite the opening. In the 17th century, the projection room was used by artists who wanted to record a true picture of reality by tracing the projected images of light. In 'The Dark Room', you could see the criss-crossed diagonal lines on the old Dutch shutters as a blueprint for the way in which the lens 'inverts' the image. In 'Untitled', a drawing from 1986, the intersection is the hole through which the image is projected onto the wall.

In a camera, the lens is opened and closed with a shutter and the amount of light that enters is regulated by the diaphragm, which is the camera's iris. It consists of several overlapping sliding blades that form an almost circular opening. If a heavily overexposed section of the photo is star shaped, this is often the result of reflections on the edges of the blades. We are so accustomed to this illusion that the effect is introduced artificially in digital photos to make the picture seem more real.

A closed diaphragm is visible in a drawing where the caption 'Kodak Retina' suggests a link between the camera lens and the retina. In two drawings from 1986, the blades of the diaphragm form a black star. In other drawings and gouaches, we recognise the radial motif on the paintings in the exhibition, which illustrates the extent to which Daniëls' reduced visual language is based on a finely woven network of mutual references.

Another interface is the television screen. In a drawing with the annotations 'sick / free / camera crew', a painting exhibition appears on a TV screen. The exhibition and the TV programme are different presentational formats that each abide by their own laws. In a drawing from 1986, Daniëls places a television set in an exhibition hall and the paintings on the wall would appear to be the faces of the public. The mass medium on which everyone has an opinion is juxtaposed against the reflection on painting. "What is too often forgotten", wrote the artist, "is the contemplation of painting, whether it is linked to its

predecessors or not. That is the future of the museum. Which is different than the future of the TV."

The aperture in the camera obscura, the shutter in front of the window, the retina in the eye, the diaphragm in the camera – all find themselves between that which we see (the outside world) and the image of this that we form in our minds (the inner world). It is on this interface that Daniëls' research is focused. Is the painting a representation of what we see? Or does it reflect what we think? Daniëls' playful, intelligent and mysterious reflections on the nature of painting are still refreshingly topical.

Brain research has shown that memories never disappear completely. A memory can become inaccessible when it becomes separated from nerve connections, like an island. However, it can also be retrieved when it is incorporated into new connections.

Art works

Kunstwerken

René Daniëls

Untitled, ca.1987*

Untitled, ca.1987*

Untitled (Alzumeazume), 1985-1987*

Untitled, ca. 1986*

A hot day in the lighthouse, 1984

The Dark Room, 1986 *

A Room above the Pacific, 1984*

Memoirs of a forgetful one, 1986*

Olieverf op doek

Untitled, 1986*

Untitled, 1986*

Untitled, 1986*

Untitled, 1986*

Untitled, 1985*

Untitled (ill, free and camera crew), 1985-1987*

Untitled, ca 1986*

Untitled (Kodak Retina), s.a.*

*On loan Stichting René Daniëls