

# Marcel van Eeden

*Art Forum*

Mars 2013 (page 287-288)

par Riccardo Venturi

PARIS

## Marcel van Eeden

GALERIE IN SITU/FABIENNE LECLERC, PARIS

Since 1993, Marcel van Eeden has adopted a daily practice of making pencil-and-charcoal drawings, black and white with the occasional introduction of color. The accumulation of drawings marks the passage of his existence, yet the works do not depict moments in his own life. Instead, the images derive from all sorts of photos, ads, film stills, and so on, without indication of provenance, like a visual archive for which the documentation has been lost, or like a calendar that indicates the day of who knows what year. This is not just any past, but rather one technologically filtered by the eye of the camera and dating entirely from before 1965, the year of van Eeden's birth. The only other certainty is that what is exhibited, whether photographed or filmed, actually took place.

Van Eeden's drawings represent microevents of which he had no direct experience and to which he cannot bear witness. In other words, they constitute an artificial memory. Perhaps this is why they need to be the product of a rigorously standardized practice. For instance, he makes his drawings in three—and only three—recurrent formats, and their execution always proceeds from upper left to lower right. Installed on the walls in an undulating arrangement rather than in a straight line, the drawings show a universe immersed in fog, historically indeterminate, far from the great dramatic events that marked the early and mid-twentieth century. All attention is focused on details and apparently insignificant gestures, as if these might reveal hidden truths or simply some clue to the artist's existence.

Not coincidentally, van Eeden's first works, from around 1993–96, were all set in The Hague, where he was raised. However, in recent years, he has become open to fiction, following events in the lives of various imaginary figures or alter egos, as in "The Archeologist, The Travels of Oswald Sollmann," 2007–2008, a series of more than 150 drawings. The series that dominated (and gave its title to) this exhibition,



Marcel van Eeden,  
*Untitled #9, The  
Hotel, 2012*, pencil  
on paper, 7 x 11".  
From the series  
"The Hotel," 2012–.

"The Hotel," 2012–, has a narrative structure, a mysterious plot reminiscent of film noir detective stories—a genre whose artificially lit, nocturnal urban atmospheres are rendered perfectly by charcoal and pencil, with the unfolding tale punctuated by texts that act as something like a voice-over. In one sequence, van Eeden shows the moments preceding the explosion of a bomb in a hotel lobby; the only works in the series that incorporate color represent precisely the moment when the bomb is detonated.

The last room in the show was a three-dimensional reconstruction of a hotel lobby, dimly lit and with jazzy Muzak playing in the background. Entering it was like being suddenly catapulted into one of van Eeden's



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drawings, like crossing over to the other side of a mirror. Settling into the armchairs, one could hardly relax: The moment seemed fraught with tension, as if it were the one prior to the conflagration evoked by the images on the walls, those violent drawings that gave the suite its sole point of color, perhaps in anticipation of that other explosive moment—namely, the birth of the artist.

—Riccardo Venturi

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.