



KENISMAN

Mirrors 616-111 [Eye=I]

With an essay by **Ulrike Müller**

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KENISMAN. Reflections on the Flow

“The aim of art is not to copy nature, but to express it.
You are not a servile copyist, but a poet!”

— Honoré de Balzac, The Unknown Masterpiece

“Nulla dies sine linea. No day without a line.”

— Pliny the Elder

1. Mirrors 616-111 [Eye = I]

We believe in what we see. And we believe what we see is true and real. When we see a chair, we immediately acknowledge its function as a seat. We behold a pen and know it is made for writing or drawing. And when we see an apple, it is generally taken for granted that it will indeed taste like an apple once we eat it. Our belief in the truthfulness of the visual sense arises from its very practicality in our everyday life. Seeing is essential to functioning in the modern world. Visual signs and symbols not only manage our traffic, urban environment and work life. Sight and visibility, moreover, dominate our leisure activities, channel our private interests and social relations. Seeing a street sign and recognizing its meaning is crucial to road safety. Advertising campaigns and billboards, so ubiquitous in our present-day cityscapes, can however also manipulate our sensual perception and desires before we even realize what we actually see. Seeing is thus closely linked to the materiality and pragmatism of the world we live in and the objects that surround us. The belief that seeing is truth creates a stability that we rely on and that we interact with every single day of our lives.

Art, however, can disrupt this confident belief in what we see and

the associated truth claims, for art has the power to make us aware of the fact that not everything necessarily is what it looks like. Perhaps the most visually striking demonstration of this power is the oeuvre of René Magritte. Magritte's famous painting *La trahison des images* (better known as *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*) is merely a painting of a pipe, and despite the extremely realistic likeness of the painted object, entire worlds lie between it and a 'real' pipe. Nothing could better point out the intricate problem of reality, realism and representation. But how can we define reality at all? [1]

Like an imaginary window, an artwork can open up unexpected views of the world. And like a mirror, an artwork can sometimes throw us back on ourselves, forcing us to perceive our own world, our thoughts and ways of reasoning

from a new and unanticipated angle.

The work of the Belgium-based artist KENISMAN deliberately breaks with the truth claims of the seen reality. It challenges and calls into question the way we see things and it encourages us to look – and think – twice.

[1] Michel Foucault, *This is not a Pipe*, Montpellier 1973.

In KENISMAN's art, everything starts with a line. It is a secure line, gently oscillating over the white surface, deliberate and yet thoughtless. A line drawn by an artist's hand that the eye is deemed to follow. A line, a curl, circles and bows, rigorously black on white, rhythmically structuring the painting surface as an imaginative net, firm but fluid at the same time. Watching the artist at work



Garden, acrylic on panel, 20 cm x 20 cm / 7.9" x 7.9"

during his live action painting performances, which are often accompanied by live music, has something contemplative, meditative. Entirely immersed in the constant flow of his work, the artist seems to become one with the pen he is holding, with the line he is drawing, with the work he is creating. The viewer of this performance – just like the artist himself – is drawn into the slow but steady growth of shapes and forms over the white surface.

KENISMAN's series *Mirrors 616-111* bears the reflection of a sensitive, searching hand and a visionary mind. Like mirrors, the paintings are two-dimensional, while at the same time involving a vital sense of depth. They are inner land- and soundscapes, reminiscent of distant memories, they are floating dreams, visions of waving trees and gentle profiles at a starry night.

While some paintings from the series appear more turbulent and hectic, evincing a bold enthusiasm, excitement or inner struggle, others are dispassioned, emanating a sense of tranquility and a meditative spirit. In *Venus*, *The arrival*, *GongZhu* and *Garden*, the omnipresent swirling movement speaks from an endless number of small waves and glowing spirals. The works are laden with flowing shapes and geometric forms,

continuously pushing and pulling, threatening to burst the picture's boundaries in order to reach beyond into another dimension. Looking through the window, Deep sleep and Love for the unborn child, on the other hand, appeal to the viewer's eye by means of their calm, balanced and self-contained compositions, in which the central shapes and the surrounding rhythmic swirls and energetic flows

method, the adopted medium and stylistic choices, the recurring shapes and alleged allusions all bear reference of the overarching aim to turn the inner inspiration outwards and let the mind float free.

The single works from KENISMAN's series *Mirrors 616-111* are reflections on the themes of creation and inspiration. The



Venus, ink on paper, 20 cm x 20 cm / 7.9" x 7.9"

form a clearly confined, consistent whole.

What unites the single pieces from the series is the interrogative approach and the intuitive, playful assemblage of shapes and forms it generates. The artist's working

paintings rest upon the artist's continuous personal research on how reality is constructed. As internal mirrors, KENISMAN's works reflect on the artist's own access to creativity, his inner resources and means to free artistic creation.

2. The Line and the Flow

In the beginning there was the line. The largest architectural project necessarily rests upon a first structural drawing, whereas even the design of such inconspicuous everyday objects like a lemon squeezer starts with a concept draft. And already the Old Masters of past epochs based their most famous works of art on swift sketches and preparatory drawings. The drawn line, so it seems, is the most universal creative medium, suited for innumerable aims and purposes.

Over and above, the drawn line is also one of the most expressive means at the artist's disposal. For centuries the graphic element has been used to capture the subtle facial expressions and postures of a portrait sitter, the spontaneity of a lively street scene full of movement and interactions, or the essence of a landscape during quickly-changing atmospheric conditions. With the help of his lines KENISMAN, however, does not aim to imitate a deceptive, external reality. His work, instead, reflects the attempt to give expression to an inner truth.

Before setting his hands on a new work, KENISMAN does not know what the finished piece will look like. The artist does not have a prefabricated image in his mind, modeled after a material

reality whose likeness he wants to reproduce on the painting surface. He does not know what he will create. Instead, when starting to work on a new piece, KENISMAN lets the lines flow as he lets go his thoughts. The eye follows the hand. The hand follows the eye. The artist does not allow his creativity to be blurred by a previsioned image to be (re-) produced on paper. KENISMAN's approach lies in the pure and undistracted concentration on the natural evolution of lines and shapes under the artist's hand.

Neither does he allow to let his creative process be inhibited by



the pursuit of a set of prearranged material or technical conventions in order to obtain a particular, controllable result. It is his aim to leave as much freedom as possible to his formal choices. In this

sense, working in black and white does not constitute a restriction. Rather, this technique permits the artist an enormous freedom in the handling of his graphic means and it stimulates the possibility to unrestricted experimentation. In literally not having to put his hand down to consciously choose a different pen or color, the artist is able to let his creativity flow freely over the painting surface, following only his own, inner rhythm. In this way, The drawn line enables the artist to capture and express the driving force of his natural inspiration in his own, idiosyncratic way.

KENISMAN's art is enacted freely, continuously and in a natural way. Accordingly, the characteristic formal features that dominate his work – the floating curls and loops, the waving contours (so often

resembling a human profile) and the elongated shapes, stretching out like branches of a tree or coral – epitomize the occupation with natural growth in his approach. These recurring forms bear a strong affinity with the ancient rock carvings and cave paintings of the late Paleolithic and Neolithic era that can be found in England, Ireland and Brittany. Like these pre-historic artistic forms, KENISMAN's paintings are born out of the complete immersion in a pure and innate urge to expression. KENISMAN's graphic means, therefore, are in effect naturalistic forms. Forms that suggest organic growth and evolution, forms that incorporate and reveal the natural flow of the creator's hand.

And yet, *the aim of art is not to copy nature, but to express it.* But what is an appropriate expression of nature? And what is the individual artist's interpretation of this expression? What is reality? What is art? For KENISMAN, true artistic creativity lies in the constant search for answers.

The ability to ask oneself the right questions and the process of finding (one's own) answers correspond to KENISMAN's method of continuous artistic experimentation. In true art there is no failure. There is no correct or wrong approach in the individual artist's manner. There is only



the continuous experiment of artistic creation. It is the fear of failing that inhibits the creation of the innovative work of art, as it detains the mind from the free flow. There are no wrong lines, only the insecure painted lines destroy. Only the constant, unbiased and uninhibited experiment brings forth the spontaneous forms and shapes that feed the artist's search for new ways and methods of painterly expression, free from common ideas and established models. Experimentation and self-direction are crucial factors in KENISMAN's artistic approach, and thus inevitably become the determining aspects of the eventual work of art.

The essence of KENISMAN's art lies in thorough introspection and an adequate reflection of his internal research through the

graphic-painterly medium. In KENISMAN's artistic practice, the phrase *the journey is the reward* obtains a very personal meaning as it is also translated into his live action painting, a performance-like realization of his art. In this process, KENISMAN follows only his own internal guide. The artist is the one and only director of his own work. More important than the actual, tangible work of art produced, therefore, is the act of independent and uninhibited artistic creation itself.

3. Insight, Inner Sight and the Freedom of Artistic Creation

KENISMAN's paintings are definitive in their extent, with their borders clearly defined by the format of the used surface. Yet, at the same time the paintings seemingly attempt to surpass the scope of the predetermined format. Their swirling waves and growing coral branches are reaching out far beyond the rectangular picture plane. It is the suggestive force of the artworks that allows them to extend their dimensions in any direction. Just like a landscape painting, so it seems, each individual work is but an extract from a larger composition, a detail in which the artist sought refuge for the moment of its creation. Each painting mirrors the inner process of inspiration within the artist. Every single piece from the series thus becomes a snapshot of a bigger picture.

The finished work of art, the result of the physical act of drawing and painting, reveals a highly visionary nature that lies not so much in the painting's own materiality but instead in its interrogative visualization and dynamic openness. For KENISMAN, the act of artistic creation serves a higher purpose. His artistic practice functions as a means to better understand what and how we see.

At the heart of the KENISMAN's formal choices lies a reflection on the veracity of vision and the possibilities and limitations of representation that bears a philosophical dimension. What do

ideas and convictions, prejudices, dreams and preferences.

Our visual perception of the external world is not objective and free. The reality that we believe to see, and



we see? What is reality? Is there such a thing as realism and a realistic image? An artist's attempt to copy reality as it really is must always be futile. For one can only portray what one can see by oneself, from one's individual perspective and within the limits of one's own creative skills. The attempt to create an artwork that pretends to represent the realities of several persons at once, or even claims universal validity, is necessarily deemed to fail given the fact that every person's vision functions on the basis of his or her own

the way how we see it, is instead for the greatest part determined by our social, educational, cultural and psychological background. Other aspects such as religious and ideological beliefs, moral values or social roles shape our view on reality even without us being aware of it. As the prisoners in Plato's cave, we can only see what we are used to see, and we believe that what we see is the true and only shape of the world. As a result, also our knowledge – intrinsically intertwined with the visual sense – is shaped by and dependent on

a range of external factors. We can only see what we know, and we can only know what we have seen, i.e. what we have been taught to see.

The prevalent socio-cultural habits and established patterns of sight and knowledge therefore fundamentally shape how we experience the world, what we see, how we interpret it and which associations and conclusions we are able draw from it. Seeing is recognizing shapes and truths that we already know. The astonishing work of our brain is based on constant comparison and reconnection of new things perceived to the information saved in our memory. It is for this reason that the beholder of KENISMAN's works tends to recognize figurative elements in the abstract paintings such as facial features or eyes, tree and coral branches or starry skies. Different people will moreover always see different things in the paintings, for different people are attracted to different things and memories, confirming the uniqueness of every individual's condition and world view. The various possible associations are, as it were, a trick played by the visual memories saved in our brains. The actual details on the painting surface, in fact, reveal themselves as mere accumulations of lines and shapes.

Through his art KENISMAN

gains the possibility to distinguish his sight from an uncertain and deceptive reality. In his artistic process lies a meditative force that allows him to separate external perception from internal vision. By this means, KENISMAN is able to create a clearly defined inner space for reflection and to develop a true inner sight. This inner sight

In concentrating exclusively on the act of creation itself, the artist gains access to his individual inner sources of inspiration and originality. In transcending the conscious, in leaving behind the known reality with its common knowledge and established viewing patterns, it is the artistic process itself that reveals the creative



GongZhu on her balcony, the wild boar plunged in thought, acrylic on canvas

makes it possible to transcend the representational realism of much conventional art that is based on a misleading idea of reality. Like a third eye, KENISMAN's practice allows him to direct his attention to his inner reservoir of creativity and to discover the means to give it an appropriate artistic expression, thereby freeing his artistic activity from the preconditioned mind.

energy of the unconscious. It provides the means to understand the nature and functioning of the visual sense and allows insights into the driving forces of true and original artistic creativity.

Insight is the beginning of change. Our realization and awareness of the conventional viewing patterns that govern our everyday lives

enables us to see things from a different angle, it catalyzes the possibility to see something new.

KENISMAN's art is nothing other than itself, autonomous from the constraints to represent anything, from the need to refer to any external realities. His method of automatic drawing departs from nothing other than the will to artistic creation, with no underlying representational or psychological intention preconditioning his work. In so doing, the artist is able to leave behind the constraints of realism and reality, in order to create his own idiosyncratic and original art.

The bigger picture that KENISMAN's oeuvre revolves around is the complex process of artistic inspiration and creation. Through his paintings, KENISMAN gives expression to his philosophy of the inspirational potential of internal vision. KENISMAN's series *Mirrors 616-111* is a powerful reflection on the sources of and access to artistic creativity. For they originate not in external things, but precisely in the concentration on the power of the third eye and the freedom of artistic creation.

616-111. A Note on Numerology

In occultist numerology, the number 1 stands for the creative spirit or the energy of creation, having its source in 0 which represents the origin of all things. The number 6, on the other hand, is a sacred number representing the soul of man, which for its part demonstrates the omnipotent power of God and is believed to be all-sufficient. The combination 616, therefore, can be interpreted as the merging of the human soul in its ability to and belief in one's own creation.

Furthermore, the number 616 is according to some theories also referred to as the number of the Devil. The most ancient source on the basis of these theories is a Greek manuscript from the third century AD in which the number of the beast is given as 616, thus offering an alternative reading of the 666. [2] In Christianity, the Devil is sometimes also called Satan or Lucifer. Especially Lucifer, however, also has another particular connotation, namely as the light bearer. In this sense, Lucifer represents the equivalent to Prometheus from Greek Mythology. In occultism as well as in Gnosticism, Lucifer is revered not as the devil, but instead as a liberator and guiding spirit, as motivator and illuminating force of the mind and the subconscious,

very much in line with idea of Lucifer as bringer of light and enlightenment.

In the traditional reading of the number of the beast, the 666 points to the closed power of the triplet, i.e. the inaccessibility of its full symbolic potential. By contrast, in the number 616 the double 6 is opened up by 1, thus revealing the open and uninhibited force of the creative spirit and resulting in the realization of the full potential of the combination 6, 1 and 6. The number 616 thus stands for openness, creativity and (self-) awareness.

The triple 1 enhances this reading by means of channeling the energy of creation into an effective force. The intrinsic meaning of the number 1 emphatically reminds us that one is the director of one's own life, that creation lies in our hands. There is, moreover, a remarkable affinity between the number 1 and the human sense of sight. The Arabic number 1 equals the Roman numeral I, which, in turn also signifies the self as well as the eye (Eye = I). The seeing eye thus functions as a mirror on multiple levels. It mirrors and is at the same time mirrored in its own creation.

The numerological dimension of KENISMAN's series *Mirrors 616-111* echoes the idea of the artist as the conscious designer of life, a

determined creator who is in state to shape and determine his own reality by means of his work.

[2] The papyrus 115 is a fragmented manuscript of the New Testament dating from ca. 225-275 AD, written in Greek and containing parts of the Book of Revelation which gives the number of the beast as 616. It is preserved in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (P. Oxy. 4499).

About the author: Ulrike Müller

Ulrike Müller (°1986) holds a Research Master's degree in art and cultural history from Utrecht University. During her studies she specialized in the history of taste and collecting with a focus on Belgium and the Netherlands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Ulrike has international work and research experience in museums and cultural institutions, having worked, among others, in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden, Germany, the Museum der Bildenden Künste in Leipzig, Germany and in the Museum



The artist in front of his canvas, acrylic on canvas, 60cm x 50cm / 1' 11.6" x 1' 7.7"

Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp, Belgium. In October 2014, Ulrike initiated her PhD research at Ghent University and the University of Antwerp. In her PhD project she is studying the role of private collectors in the nineteenth-century Belgian art world and their impact on the emergence of a national taste and artistic canon.

Ulrike is particularly interested in the changing cultural perceptions of art over time and space. Every culture and every period has its particular sets of beliefs, ideals, norms and values, which manifest themselves in a distinct view on

reality, a particular use of art and representation, and an idiosyncratic appropriation of truth. The study of these mechanisms of perception, (artistic) creation and knowledge formation enables us to better understand the origins and the conditions of our own contemporary culture and the meaning we attach to ideas and things.



Untitled, 2013

Ink on paper, 100cm x 70cm / 3' 3.4" x 2' 3.5"



The arrival, 2014
Acrylic on canvas, 120cm x 80cm / 3' 11.3" x 2' 7.5"



**‘The true poet dreams being awake.
He is not possessed by his subject but has dominion over.’**

‘真正的诗人在创作时是像醒着做梦。
他不会被创作的主体占有，而是凌驾于其上。’



Untitled, 2014

Acrylic on canvas, 100cm x 80cm / 3' 3.4" x 2' 7.5"



The garden, 2014
Acrylic on panel, 110cm x 50cm / 3' 7.3" x 1' 7.7"



Venus, 2014
Ink on paper, 29,7cm x 21cm / 11.8" x 8.3"



Untitled, 2014
Ink on paper, 29,7cm x 21cm / 11.8" x 8.3"



The cave, 2014
Ink on paper, 29,7cm x 21cm / 11.8" x 8.3"



Looking through the window, 2014
Acrylic on canvas, 50cm x 60cm / 1' 7.7" x 1' 11.6"



Nomad moving his home, 2014
Ink on paper, 29,7cm x 21cm / 11.8" x 8.3"



Moonscape, 2014
Ink on paper, 29,7cm x 21cm / 11.8" x 8.3"



‘The aim of art is not to copy nature, but to express it.’

‘艺术的宗旨不是复制本原，而是在于表达。’



The kiss, 2015
Ink on paper, 29,7cm x 21cm / 11.8" x 8.3"



Romance, 2014
Ink on paper, 29,7cm x 21cm / 11.8" x 8.3"



The love for her unborn child, 2014
Ink on paper, 29,7cm x 21cm / 11.8" x 8.3"



Adilia dreaming in the park, 2014
Acrylic on canvas, 50cm x 60cm / 1' 7.7" x 1' 11.6"



Waiting, 2014
Ink on paper, 42cm x 29,7cm / 1' 4.5" x 11.8"



Floating, 2014

Ink on paper, 42cm x 29,7cm / 1' 4.5" x 11.8"



Deep sleep, 2014
Ink on paper, 21cm x 29,7cm / 8.3" x 11.8"



Dreaming in front of the house, 2014
Acrylic on canvas, 60cm x 50cm / 1' 11.6" x 1' 7.7"



Untitled, 2015

Acrylic on canvas, 20cm x 20cm / 7.87" x 7.87"

**‘I never know what the outcome of my painting will be.
To predict it would be to produce it before it was produced.’**

‘我从来不预测绘画的结果。
这将会把画作在完成之前已定型。’



GongZhu in the forest, 2014
Acrylic on canvas, 80cm x 100cm/ 2' 7.5" x 3' 3.4"



GongZhu on her balcony, the wild boar plunged in thought, 2014
Acrylic on canvas, 60cm x 50cm / 1' 11.6" x 1' 7.7"



Untitled, 2014

Acrylic on canvas, 60cm x 50cm / 1' 11.6" x 1' 7.7"



Untitled, 2014
Acrylic on canvas, 60cm x 50cm / 1' 11.6" x 1' 7.7"



Untitled, 2014

Acrylic on canvas, 60cm x 50cm / 1' 11.6" x 1' 7.7"



Staring at his treasure, 2014
Acrylic on canvas, 60cm x 50cm / 1' 11.6" x 1' 7.7"



Untitled, 2015

4x Acrylic on canvas, 20cm x 20cm / 7.87" x 7.87"



Untitled, 2015
Acrylic on canvas, 20cm x 20cm / 7.87" x 7.87"



Untitled, 2015

Acrylic on canvas, 20cm x 20cm / 7.87" x 7.87"

**‘It’s the fear of failing that blocks innovation
because it detains the mind from the free flow.’**

‘恐惧失败会阻止革新，
因它把心灵的自由流动扣押了。’

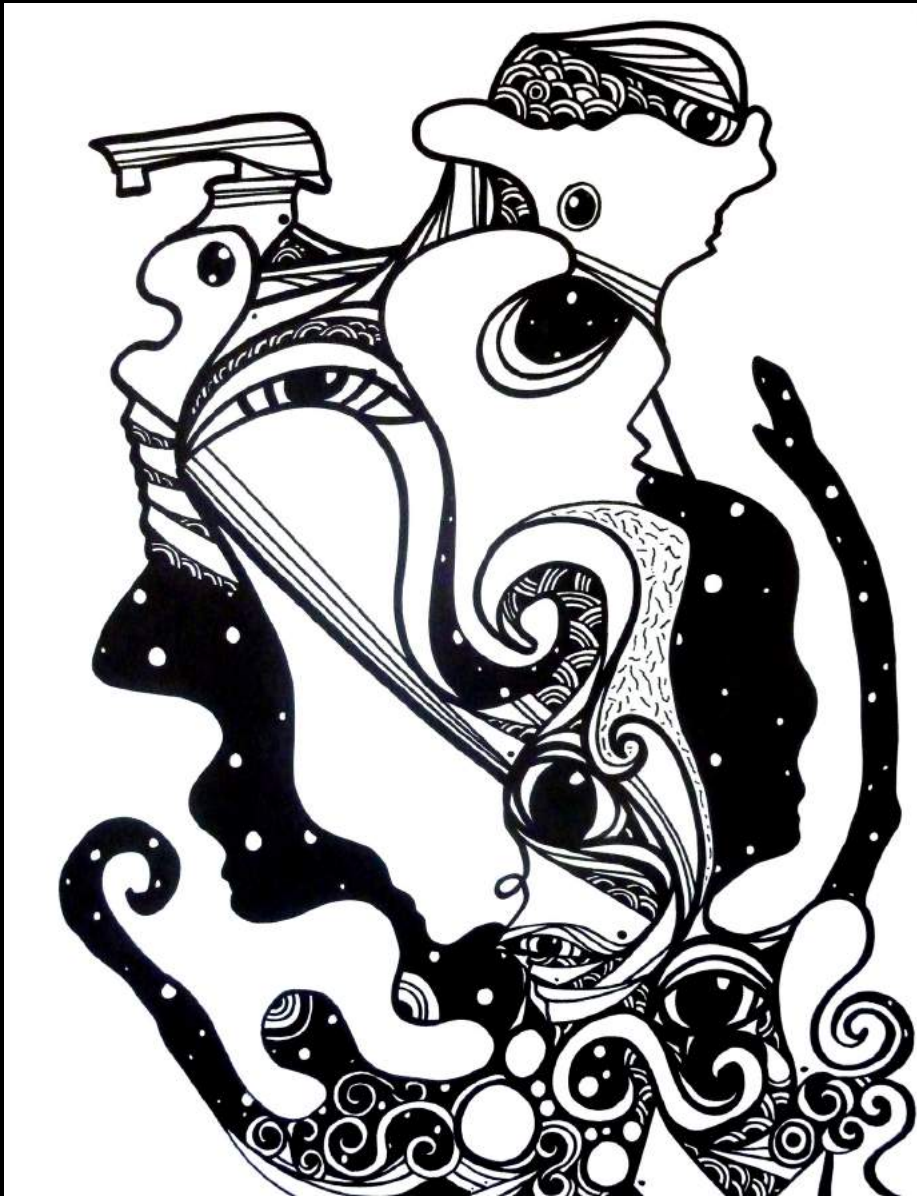


Untitled, 2015

4x Acrylic on canvas, 20cm x 20cm / 7.87" x 7.87"



Untitled, 2015
Acrylic on canvas, 20cm x 20cm / 7.87" x 7.87"



Untitled, 2015

Ink on paper, 70cm x 100cm/ 2' 3.5" x 3' 3.4"

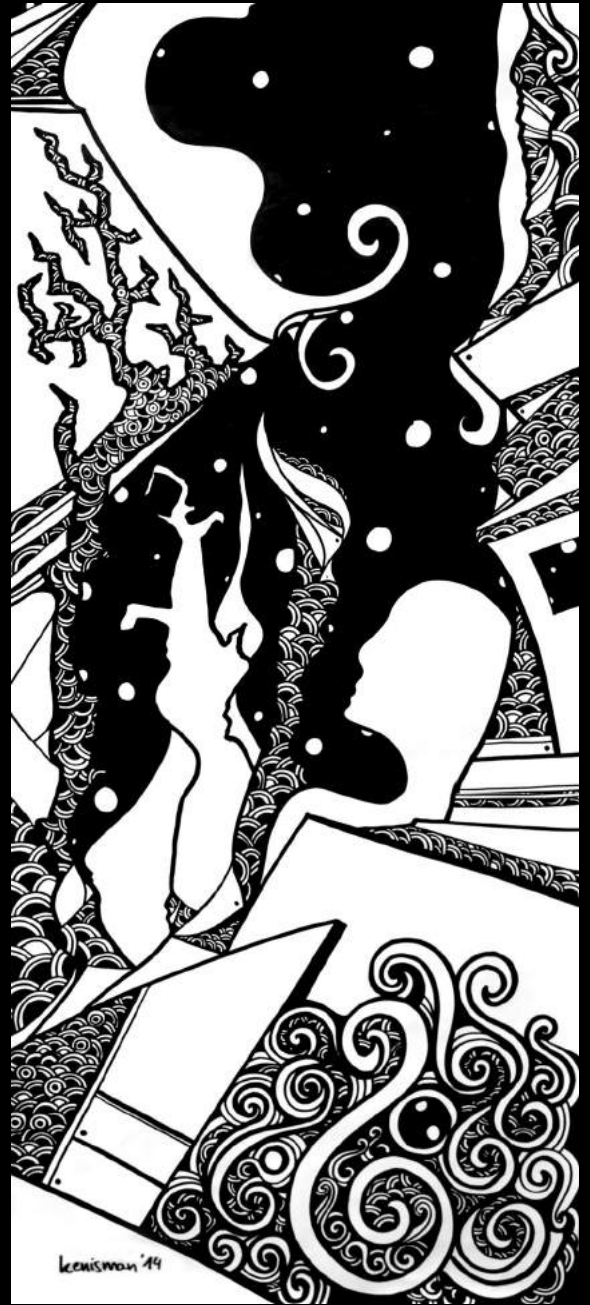


Untitled, 2016
Acrylic on canvas, 50cm x 50cm / 1' 7.7" x 1' 7.7"



Daydream, 2014

Ink on paper, 50cm x 200cm / 1' 7.7" x 6' 7" | Digital print on canvas, 2m x 8m / 6' 6.7" x 26' 2.9"





The artist in front of his canvas, 2014
Acrylic on canvas, 60cm x 50cm / 1' 11.6" x 1' 7.7"

‘A painting has to be a window to another world.’

‘一幅画应是通往另一个世界的窗口。’

