

*Thursday, August 11, 2005*



I went to a retrospective exhibition of Kees Verwey (1900-1995) at the Gemeente-museum. He was my hero in my youth. As a boy just starting to paint, I was fascinated by this old impressionistic painter who did not paint 'en plein air', but most of his life he locked himself in his studio. A devotee like a monk in a monastery. The studio was a dusty room full with pots, textiles, mirrors, withered flowers, leaves, thistles and an mysterious Egyptian sculpture. The demarcation of the studio space gave him the opportunity to enter the deeper layers of reality, Every object of the still life - insignificant as it may look- was for him an source of beauty. His still lives were never dead. He was painting the ever changing light touching the objects and the subsequently changing colours. He was constantly trying to catch these "colour moments".

Verwey was far from a friendly man. He had a difficult personality. But he was true to himself not willing to comprise himself. As a young man he was sent to prison for 10 months after refusing to wear an army uniform. Also as a painter he followed his own way, unaffected by contemporary art movements. It must have been a honor for him to have an exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum, the bastion of modern art in Holland. I saw this exhibition in 1978 and was deeply impressed by the collection of large canvasses of studio interiors painted in dark mysterious blue colors.

Verwey once said "I have made two mistakes in my life: living too long and painting too much". It would be unfair to confirm this, but truth is that in the quantity of his work the quality is not stable. Especially in his later years (in his eighties, nineties) there are a number of misses among the hits. In de Gemeentemuseum it is a bit painful to see this. It is like an aged singer who singing false in front of his audience of fans. Kees Verwey has continued painting till his 95th year and probably died with a palet in his hand.

One of my favourite paintings is his portrait of *Coba Ritsema*, a colleague painter of him. It has a rich variety of grey, green, blue and purple colours. I like to the constrast between the dark clothes and the emerald green of her shawl. Also, there are a lot of blue and greys in her skin tones. One can see Verweys masterpiece in the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem.