

# METRO PICTURES

Kimmelman, Michael. "Renée Daniels," *The New York Times* (April 28, 2000): E38.

## The New York Times

### René Daniëls

*Metro Pictures Gallery*  
519 West 24th Street  
Chelsea  
Through June 3

Times change. In the mid-1980's when the Dutch painter René Daniëls had a couple of shows at Metro Pictures, no one paid attention. Neo-Expressionism reigned. Mr. Daniëls's pictures were out of step. Maybe somebody noticed his link to Polke and Baselitz or saw that, like them and David Salle, Mr. Daniëls stole a few tricks from Picabia, the quick-change artist and all-purpose subversive. But the pictures were too subdued, too Conceptual, too ironic and too, well, Dutch, for anybody in America to care.

Fast-forward. Laconic, Conceptual painting is in. Peculiar artists like Martin Kippenberger are admired. Elizabeth Peyton and Luc Tuymans are fashionable. Picabia is king now to a new generation that includes John Currin, and suddenly Mr. Daniëls seems like a prophet. This is how the art world operates.

The current mini-retrospective of paintings and drawings scans the years through 1987, when, at 37, he had a brain aneurysm. Since then he hasn't been able to work or speak. A hesitant left-handed sketch on hotel stationery, a simple thank you to the gallery, brand new, is a modest exception.

During the 70's, Rudi Fuchs, as director of the museum in Eindhoven, was showing paintings by Polke, Penck and Richter and a lot of Conceptual work by artists like Joseph Kosuth, Daniel Buren and Jan Dibbets. All this clearly affected Mr. Daniëls, who was living there. During the 80's, he tried out different styles, interchangeably, playfully, parodying fashion, and the art sometimes had punning titles and word games.

Images recurred: a kind of branching tree that in one case he drew over an architectural plan for an apartment and elsewhere he linked with lists of names and places, making genealogies. He painted swans, landscapes and figures, gaudily, almost haphazardly; mostly, he explored the image of the receding inside of an art gallery, often simplified into a bow tie, the bow tie also painted as if on a scrim in front of the gallery. Layering, seeing through things, was a subject. The art world was another. Ambiguity mattered, as did humor.

The work counts now for reasons apart from timeliness: it wrings symbolist poetry from ordinary imagery, effortlessly. There's something going on in the work; you just never know exactly what. This is good. Also it's beautiful while trying not to be, or not to be conventionally so. Its eccentricity, once obscuring, keeps it fresh, and makes one wonder where Mr. Daniëls, now 50, would have gone.

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