



Jan (left), Sandro (right) and their cat 'Missie'



# Galerie MooiMan

## Jan van Stralen & Sandro Kortekaas

### **GALERIE MOOIMAN, IN HOLLAND** interview and photographs by David Jarrett

#### **The Largest Commercial Male figurative Art Gallery in the World**

In September 2010, I had the pleasure of visiting Galerie MooiMan (Beautiful Man) in Groningen, Holland. I was most impressed at the extensive range of male figurative art that they exhibit, ranging from erotic ceramics to sculpture to photographs to paintings, drawings, watercolors and graphic work. Located in the ground floor and rear garden (for a sculpture garden) of a large building, the two owners are committed to exhibiting and supporting “gay” art. Since it officially opened in December 2006, Galerie MooiMan has had 24 art shows, and represents over 60 artists. Located in northern part of the Netherlands, from Amsterdam Central Station, it is a two-hour and fifteen minute pleasant train ride through the country-side. With one change in Groningen to Groningen Noord it is just 2 minutes walk to the gallery. MooiMan is the artistic successor the Galerie Faubourg, which was in Amsterdam from 1992 to November 1, 2006, when it permanently closed down. Most of the artists who exhibited there have migrated over to Galerie MooiMan and represent a broad cross section of the best living European male figurative artists. I purchased two paintings from Galerie MooiMan, one of which was a superb Cornelius McCarthy cubistic painting “*Rough Diamond*”, 30x28” oil on canvas, 1996, which I had been searching for many years. When visiting Amsterdam, I urge you to take a day and travel to Groningen—to experience GalerieMooiMan. I am certain that you will be as impressed and as overwhelmed as I was.

**David Jarrett:** Why does your gallery focus on the male form?

**Galerie MooiMan:** In the 1990s, we were involved in publishing a gay diary in the Netherlands. After that project had ended, we started in 2003 with the *Homogenda*, a male figurative art diary. The reason for publishing *Homogenda* was that we wanted to showcase a beautiful diary for gay men and others who are interested in male figurative art. Through *Homogenda*, we became known to Galerie Faubourg in Amsterdam, which at that time featured male figurative art, along with selling antiques and furniture. We collaborated with them and several artists for a few years until Galerie Faubourg was suddenly closed down on November 1, 2006.

We thought that there should be a gallery for male figurative art in the Netherlands. In most of the art galleries in Holland and Europe, there is an over abundance of art featuring abstract art, females, landscapes, still lives and non-figurative art. Featuring male figurative art, particularly nudes, is a problem for most of galleries, as unfortunately sales of such art are difficult and hence not profitable for most galleries.

Over the years, Sandro and I got to know many artists who incorporate male figurative art as their principal subject. However, it had been difficult for these artists to locate a gallery that is willing to market this kind of art.

Facing Page: Rob Raats, *Big Toe*, oil on paper, 147 x 97 cm, 2002

We believed that it is necessary to have an art gallery that is not afraid to feature male figurative art. We also wanted a venue where like artists can meet each other, discuss art, showcase art, and present ideas, akin to Gertrude Stein's famous pre-war get-togethers.

So within a short time, Sandro and I decided to open a gallery in the ground floor of a building we jointly owned in Groningen, The Netherlands, which is a pleasant two-hour train ride from Amsterdam Central Station. We renovated the entire ground floor and adjacent rear garden (for exhibits of sculpture) of our building. The gallery officially opened on December 17, 2006, with the Mayor of Groningen presiding. It got a lot of publicity. Without question, the gallery is the largest commercial male figurative art gallery in the entire world.

**D.J.:** Have you encountered resistance in exhibiting this work?

**G.M.:** No, it is not a problem to exhibit male figurative art in our town. The mayor of Groningen officially opened the gallery and other officials in the local government have presided over several exhibitions. Their cooperation is marvelous.

But elsewhere, in regional art fairs or at gay pride events in Europe, people question why we are only exhibiting male figurative art. Particularly in art fairs, this is a story that we are telling to hundreds of visitors. Sometimes you will get negative responses or slurs. Rather than men, principally women appreciate our gallery and leave their (heterosexual) males standing outside. When confronted with nude males with penises, their husbands don't know where to look at or what to say.

We think that there are an increasing number of people and also some gallery owners interested in male art. And they say that it is very constructive that there exists a gallery that specializes in the art of the male body. But... resistance is growing also.



M. Joosen, *Torso J with frame*, bronze and iron, height 165 cm







**D.J.:** Do you have a humorous experience you can share related to your exhibitions?

**G.M.:** There are so many humorous things. In particular, Americans find it is strange that you show a nude male figure in the window next to the entrance of the gallery. On art fairs especially, fathers are afraid to show the male art to their sons. But mostly, boys have no problem with naked men. Fathers have! Women are often enthusiastic about so many male figures.

At an art fair in September this year there was a sturdy woman staring at a large painting by Bas Meerman, showing a male figure wearing only a blue swimsuit. The figure is surrounded by a golden background. While she was looking at this picture she turned around to us and said:

“You can see that the model is in for some fun.” We did not know how to react. Was she joking? And then she explained that from the point of view of evolution, everything you don’t use or touch will eventually fall off over many thousands of years. She meant to explain that this model had his hand in his swimsuit not only for fun but for a reason.

**D.J.:** Do you have advice for new collectors of art?

**G.M.:** It is important that new collectors buy works they like. A name of a celebrity or famous artist can be interesting, but only buying because of the name we think is not good advice. We show the diversity between different artists so that a new collector can seek his own artistic vision and select art that he can relate to. It can take years for an art collector to develop his or her personal eye for art.

Before starting our gallery we already bought some male figurative artworks from several artists. For our personal collection, we principally purchase male art and have it on the walls of our living quarters above the gallery. We have artworks of Rob Raats, Jan Griffioen, Peter Colstee, Bart Mertens, Cornelius MacCarthy, Jaap van Ek, Peter Schauwecker, Reinoud Stam, René Kuipers, Marcel Joosen and others.



**D.J.:** How does the future of male figurative art look to you? Do you need to be proactive?

**G.M.:** We try to be very active and communicative in what we are doing. Hence, we try to maintain continued good contact with both artists we represent and with our customers. Sandro and I constantly explain to customers what we are trying to accomplish by featuring male figurative art. We also seek out the reasons why people visit our gallery. By doing this, we can assist potential customers in finding what they may be looking for and to suggest guidance for them. We hope that the visitors of our gallery will start to consider the merits of buying male figurative art. As this is truly cutting-edge art, it can be an eye opener for them.



We strongly believe in quickly in paying our artists immediately upon sale of one of their works. For them, it is very important because many are struggling and need the money to live. It is also important to stimulate the artists, and by knowing that their work has found a loving home brings joy to the artist.



Looking for high quality is also important. We are looking for a good mix of all kind of techniques, styles, sizes and so on. We are always trying to extend the wide range of artworks exhibited, so it is not boring and repetitious.

We think that when you handle everything very diligently, the possibilities expand to convince art-buying people that male art is also a good subject to collect.



**D.J.:** How do you feel about artists that approach you for representation?

**G.M.:** Every week we get new solicitations, especially after an art fair. Sometimes it is easy to say no, because of the fact that the submitted artworks do not at all fit into our concept of male art. These artists did not take time to look at our web site and were ignorant of the kind art we show.

But there are so many approaches that it is hardly possible to answer all the artists. When something looks interesting, we try to visit the artist's studio or ask him to visit us. But with more than 60 artists featured in our gallery, it is hardly possible to expand that number.

Most of the paintings and photos we exhibit incorporate one or two male figures, often nude. Sometimes you can talk about really "gay art", because of the narrative in the artwork (e.g. guys having sex). But we always like to talk about "male figurative art". That's a broader expression than "gay art". Mostly the models in the artwork we exhibit are nude. Of course every now and then, the art has an erotic theme and suggestions of sex. But we cannot say that the art we are showing is typical erotic art, although most of the heterosexual visitors judge it as explicit erotic art. But for us quality is more important than an erotic narrative.

The sculptures we exhibit are principally stand-alone solo male figures.

**D.J.:** Do you feel you are unique in your representation of the male figure?

**G.M.:** In Europe there are only five commercial galleries specialized in male art: Adonis Art in London, Kunstbehandlung in Munich, Pink Art in Brussels, Au Bonheur du Jour in Paris, and Galerie MooiMan in Groningen. We don't know exactly how many male art galleries there are in the USA or elsewhere in the world.

It is perplexing that all male figurative artists are depending upon these five galleries in Europe. There should be more art collectors and also more interest in male art. The best male art artists deserve better opportunities to showcase their art. But therefore we must first change the attitudes of people in the world and their perception of male figurative art. We are trying in our way to do so.

**D.J.:** Do you remember your very first exhibition?

**G.M.:** The first exhibition showed paintings of Rolf Maas. The former mayor of our town, Jacques Wallage, officially opened our gallery. He found the idealistic idea of opening a gallery for male art in Groningen very important. Ironically, a gallery of this kind should be found in Amsterdam, rather than in Groningen. We are now planning our 25<sup>th</sup> exhibition, *Silver*, with photos of Benno Thoma and ceramics of Keith King. It will open on December 12th, 2010.

**D.J.:** Can you share your best and worst exhibition experiences?

**G.M.:** The worst experience was a woman making a throat cutting movement at an art fair when she saw an artwork of Norbert Münzer. And one neighbor did not like a beautiful wooden sculpture in the window. He did not like the sculpture because it showed a penis.

A good experience was the last client on our last art fair. He visited the stand several times and on the last day, in the last hour of the art fair, he bought a photo of Broeksma. But he was very young and was not yet able to pay for it. So we agreed to reserve the photograph for him. He agreed to save up the money and visit us in December to pick up the photograph. Hurray, a new young collector!

Also, in an art fair in September 2010, a female visitor started crying when she saw a life-size sculpture of a black man (sculpted by Marcel Joosen). The sculpture was similar to her husband, who was very ill, and the sculpture reminded her of him.



Valentin Bakardjiev, *The Night*, oil on canvas, 80 x 160 cm, 2004

**D.J.:** How can readers of *The Art of Man* contact your gallery?

**G.M.:** Our address is, Galerie MooiMan, Noorderstationsstraat 40, 9717 KP Groningen, The Netherlands. We are a two-hour train ride from Amsterdam Central Station, heading north.

Our land-line telephone from the USA is 001-31-50-571-0394 or mobile 001-31-62-633-0655. Our website is [www.mooi-man.nl](http://www.mooi-man.nl) and our email contact is [galerie@mooi-man.nl](mailto:galerie@mooi-man.nl)

**Special Note:** *The Art of Man* would like to especially thank Mr. David Jarrett for the preceding article, and all the wonderful photographs within. He is an avid collector of male figurative art and co-head of the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation's advisory committee of NYC. David continues to be instrumental in many of our publications and a strong advocate for male figurative fine art.



McCarthy, *Rough Diamond*, oil on canvas, 30 x 28 in, 1996  
In the collection of David Jarrett from Galerie MooiMan

You can see more of David's own photography work and read about this remarkable man at his website.

[www.DavidJarrett-photography.com](http://www.DavidJarrett-photography.com)