

ART CELEBRITY

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LAUNCH COLLECTION



Where the Sea Breathes *and* the Soul Paints:

ROBERT VAN DE GRAAF

THE QUIETLY RADICAL WORLD OF ROBERT VAN DE GRAAF
A MEDITATIVE JOURNEY THROUGH THE MYSTICAL,
MINIMALIST STUDIO LIFE OF THE DUTCH ARTIST
REDEFINING SPIRITUAL MODERNISM.

ART CELEBRITY MAGAZINE

Art Celebrity Magazine

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ART CELEBRITY'S CHOICE



There are artists whose work dazzles, and then there are artists whose work haunts. Robert van de Graaf belongs, unmistakably, to the latter. His paintings linger — not just in memory, but somewhere deeper, in that quiet part of the self we rarely name.

When our editorial team first encountered his work, it was not the size or technique that struck us first — though his mastery of oil, layered brushwork, and scale is undeniable. It was the feeling they left behind. The hush. The space. The invitation to pause and look inward. His work doesn't just depict scenes; it channels states of being.

What makes van de Graaf extraordinary is not just his artistic skill, but his commitment to exploring the spiritual dimension through contemporary painting. Educated as an architect at the Technical University of Delft, he possesses a rare sense of structure and balance. But it is his lifelong inner inquiry — his fascination with mysticism, the natural world, and emotional transcendence — that gives his work its quiet, breathtaking power.

His journey is one of depth, not performance. From early training with the late Erica Meister, to contemplative walks by the North Sea, to the symbolic resonance of places like Patmos and Harlem, his life and work are inseparable. Every canvas is a mirror of that interior world. In a global art scene that often chases noise and novelty, Robert van de Graaf offers something altogether more precious: stillness, sincerity, and spiritual gravitas. He doesn't paint to impress. He paints to remember, to awaken, and to connect.

This is why we chose him. Because in his work, we are reminded that art at its highest form is not spectacle — but soul.

ROBERT VAN DE GRAAF

In the quietly windswept city of The Hague, nestled between the restrained elegance of Dutch architecture and the eternal murmur of the North Sea, lives an artist whose vision transcends the temporal. Robert van de Graaf—born in 1983 in the Netherlands—is not merely a visual artist. He is, perhaps more accurately, a cartographer of the soul, tracing unseen landscapes where mysticism, memory, and emotion converge.

Before embracing the uncharted terrains of fine art, van de Graaf trained his eye in the calculated geometry of built environments. A Master of Science in Architecture from the esteemed Technical University of Delft, he once imagined cathedrals in steel and glass. In 2005 and 2006, the bustling dynamism of New York City called—he answered, interning at Steven Learner Studio by day while conjuring deeply personal works of art in his West Harlem atelier by night. There, amid the city’s relentless energy, a quieter spiritual dialogue began to whisper—a murmur that would soon become his life’s calling.

Since 2012, Robert van de Graaf has devoted himself entirely to painting. And not just painting, but to the pursuit of something sacred. His oeuvre—a profound, evolving body of work—is defined by its thematic depth and contemplative beauty. Exhibited across both digital and physical realms, his work reached a pivotal crescendo in 2023 at the ‘Salon des Arts’ in Maastricht. Curated by the revered Ad Himmelreich—former conservator of the Bonnefantenmuseum—the solo exhibition revealed the spiritual undercurrents and poetic sensibilities of van de Graaf’s artistic practice. Himmelreich, whose critical essay accompanied the exhibition, offered rare insight into a visual language that defies simple classification.

His representation by Al-Tiba9 Contemporary (Barcelona) on Art.sy speaks to his international reach, while the resonance of his paintings has led to inclusion in private collections across the Netherlands, the United States, and France. The world has taken notice. Prestigious publications including Aesthetica Magazine, Art Maze Magazine, Al-Tiba9 Art



Let the Flowers in Your Heart Bloom, 2022, Oil on linen, 210 x 160 x 2,5 cm





THE TRANSCENDENT WORLD OF ROBERT VAN DE GRAAF

Magazine, Contemporary Art Collector Magazine, and Artsin Square have all spotlighted his evocative works.

But to understand van de Graaf's artistry, one must journey back to the gentle intimacy of his earliest creative formation. From 1996 to 2001, he was mentored privately in painting and drawing by the Dutch artist Erica Meyster (1949–2006). These years—marked by quiet instruction and intense exploration—still pulse within each canvas he creates. That period was more than education; it was initiation. At the heart of van de Graaf's practice lies a compelling paradox: the exploration of the mystical within the material. He is mesmerized by the interplay between light and shadow, nature and structure, the sea and the soul. His paintings are metaphysical invitations—complex compositions where inner visions are rendered in gestural marks, ethereal textures, and luminous colour fields. These are not mere landscapes or abstract reflections. They are revelations.

His work interrogates the ineffable. With each brushstroke, he asks: What is human destiny? Can we grow beyond our material bounds? Can art open the self, like a door, to something deeper, something divine? The viewer, standing before his work, is subtly drawn into a reflective embrace. His paintings do not merely gaze outward—they gaze back.

Inspiration for van de Graaf is gathered like sacred relics from the altar of life. From ancient mythologies to modern mysticism, from spiritual philosophies to sacred geographies—his references are as layered as his oil paint. He nods quietly to Caspar David Friedrich's sublime isolation, the alchemical gravitas of Anselm Kiefer, the lyrical abstraction of Joan Mitchell, and the masterful reverence of the old Dutch painters. And yet, his voice is unmistakably his own.

The process is as important as the result. Working primarily in oil, van de Graaf builds his paintings in stages: with drawing, watercolour, and then oil, coaxing each layer into existence. His hand alternates between energetic gestures and delicate precision. The canvas becomes a battleground of expression and contemplation—each piece an artifact of his inner dialogue. Many of his paintings exist on a monumental scale, oscillating between abstraction and figuration, allowing viewers a space for both wonder and interpretation. His canvases call us to open. To turn inward. To remember the child within who once saw magic in the margins of the world.

And if we are willing, his paintings become more than pigment and form. They become thresholds. Mirrors. Invitations to revelation.



The Birth of Air Castles, 2022, Oil on linen, 210 x 160 x 2,5 cm

When I was a child, I was firmly convinced that gnomes lived in a certain corner of our garden, behind some bushes. How long I stared at them, I don't know. Perhaps it was no more than a single moment. Was this my first mystical experience? I don't know.

This early memory suddenly resurfaced when I encountered the paintings of Robert van de Graaf. His works refer to specific places, or perhaps better said: specific moments. What we see are not literal depictions of locations, but inner images—visions he has captured on canvas with startling clarity.

Robert van de Graaf lives on the edge of the North Sea, where the rhythm of ebb and flow and the gently bending horizon bring you into a deep awareness of your own breath and the sheer insignificance of human existence. The landscape-like character of most of his paintings can surely be traced back to this environment.

A journey to the island of Patmos has also been a wellspring of inspiration. According to tradition, as Wikipedia notes, the evangelist John was exiled there around 95 AD. It was in the Cave of the Apocalypse that he wrote the Book of Revelation. This makes Patmos a 'Holy Island' for many. Yet more important than the island itself—or even the Christian tradition it carries—is the vision granted to a solitary person in isolation. John's cave echoes, in a way, in the solitude of the painter's studio. It is the spiritual state, the moment of complete openness that allows for revelation, which defines the essence of van de Graaf's work.

At the same time, Robert feels an enduring pull toward the ever-awake city, that "city that never sleeps." Certainly, a metropolis like New York—where he spent a year working as an architect at Steven Learner Studio and also as an artist—offers unexpected pockets of stillness and spiritual elevation. A series of small paintings in this exhibition are inspired by such locations. In them, his intimate focus on architectural details suggests the overwhelming grandeur of the whole—like the immense neo-Gothic Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in Harlem, which remains under construction to this day. Coincidentally—or perhaps not—the same saint reappears here.

His paintings make it clear: Robert van de Graaf seeks the divine not through dogma, but through introspection. Unbound by any religious structure—which by definition represents a collective—his work points to a profound yearning for inner liberation. In this, one might recognize a certain kinship with spiritual movements from around 1900, which were themselves deeply influential on modern art.

I'm thinking particularly of Theosophy, which strives for a deeper understanding of reality and the truth that lies behind outward appearances. It starts from the premise that consciousness precedes manifestation. While Robert van de Graaf is not a Theosophist, a spiritual resonance is unmistakably present—if only because of the shared search for inner freedom.

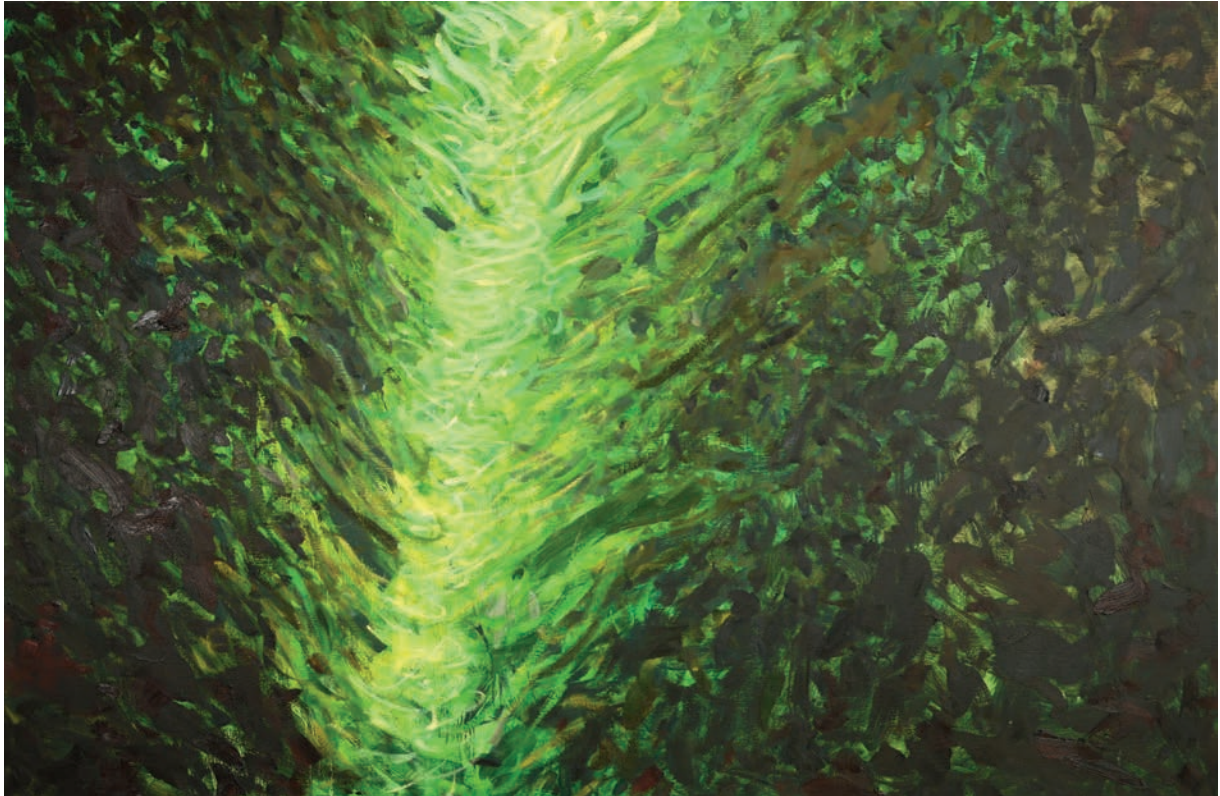
For him, this consciousness becomes a radical openness—an inner clearing that enables the viewer to discover new mental and spiritual spaces. The paintings in this exhibition appeal to that very capacity for openness in us. But before you can find it, you must first seek out the child within yourself.

Ad Himmelreich

Maastricht, March 10, 2023



A selection of inspiration in the studio_2024



Finding the Little Way in Dark Times, 2024, Oil on linen, 150 x 200 x 2,5 cm



She Wants to Spread the Love Flames of Her Soul, 2024, Oil on linen, 150 x 200 x 2,5 cm



The artist in front of the triptych Stories of the Ego, Self, Soul_2022

