

# Urbanism - Anne Van Boxelaere

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Tight lines, regular and repetitive grid patterns shape urban landscapes. There are hardly any resting points. That hustle and bustle to look at makes us feel uncomfortable without thinking about it. Anne Van Boxelaere (°1983) singles out these lines and paints them. The grids are a metaphor for how we subdivide and interpret reality. We look at the world from our framework. Her series of paintings of office buildings emphasises the tautness of horizontal and vertical lines. The depiction of light forms an essential part of her work. She uses colours or textures to represent light and make patterns visible.

Van Boxelaere paints trees surrounded by an urban rigid structure. The play of colours depicts the light reflection in and mobility of trees. In this way she emphasises the contrast between a natural and an urban environment. Straight or supple: everything is subject to change. In her paintings, Van Boxelaere shows that a grid is only a constructed reality that can be broken or changed. Building up, breaking down and building up again are central to her working method. She puts a material on her canvases, scratches or paints away part of it and then puts another layer on top. When she paints with oil, she puts many transparent layers on top of each other and gradually searches for the right tonality on the canvas. Van Boxelaere experiments with various materials, such as types of paint and paper, ink, powder, wax, rubber or epoxy. The results are surprising. She comes to the layering of things. In her paintings, we see how what was and what is blend together. She describes it as us being born somewhere on a page in a book. Part of it is history and part of it is yet to come, and everyone is finding their way in it. We can break things down and rebuild them, but existing structures remain present and we are always building on what was already there.

For her series of sports fields, Van Boxelaere starts from advertising leaflets and glues a thick layer of leaflets from the same shop onto a canvas. She then sands the leaflets and works away the marks. The graphic structure remains visible, but a fascinating texture appears that mixes various layers. On this paper layer, she again paints signs that refer to sports fields and sometimes spots of colour that suggest the movement of players on the field. Each shop uses a fixed design and colours to convey its message. The lines on sports fields indicate where everyone should stand. Van Boxelaere also makes paintings about time zones. This is all about socially accepted signs, agreements and conventions. It gives us a framework with which to fill in space, but the disadvantage is that we can get stuck in it if we want to define and steer everything. In various works, Van Boxelaere focuses her attention on the grid. When she threatens to get stuck in it, she breaks it open again and again. Her experiments with techniques and materials offer solace because they produce unexpected effects. That unpredictability creates an opening to break open patterns.

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We have many unspoken rules in how we behave and treat each other. Everyone positions themselves within them and seeks a balance. They differ from place to place, so it is even harder for people who come from a different culture to adapt to them. In her series of Mogadishu paintings, Van Boxelaere starts from war zones or conflict areas. Her fascination with ruins refers to the process of building up from demolition. It is not only about the physical, but also the mental reconstruction of refugees who have to find their way again.

Van Boxelaere herself lives in a city. With her work, she shows how everything can exist alongside and with each other there. Several paintings highlight the urban landscape as a construction with the presence of grids. In other works, she emphasises the city as a fabric and colourful amalgam. There, the lines fall away and the play of light and mutability comes into the foreground. This translates into paintings where various aspects, such as cultures, religions and eras, come together.

When we see her work, we are touched because with her paintings, Van Boxelaere exposes our way of thinking. It is a system that determines how we see things, but it is only an interpretation and shows us the relativity of things.

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