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It's Nice That

Gastronomy meets 70s European pop art in Kristof Santy's delectable paintings

The Belgian painter depicts markets, kitchen items and food stuffs as a way of making them "iconic" and solidifying them within history.

Words by Olivia Hingley
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Kristof Santy: Frietpot, Oil on Canvas (Copyright © Kristof Santy, 2022)

on our plate, it sets it in history." This is why he also chose to depict certain seemingly "insignificant" objects throughout the series. A large silver percolator with fat drops of coffee bubbling over, a slightly menacing-looking grater and an artfully designer toaster, all feature throughout, adding a grandeur to objects we use so mindlessly and so regularly take for granted. "A toaster is probably not an interesting subject at first sight, but once you paint it, you give it a whole new dimension," Kristof muses.

Kristof has a deep passion for art movements that have come before, specifically those who inspire his painting of day-to-day life. Of central influence to the artist is the European pop art movement of the 70s, for both its depiction of everyday objects and its graphic style – it's perhaps the most clearly apparent throughout Kristof's body of work, with his monumentalisation of simple objects. Other influences include

Since 2021, Kristof Santy has been "obsessed" with painting food-related topics. It was this obsession, and a desire to apply his signature visual style to more broader themes of "gastronomy" that inspired his recent collection for the exhibition *La Grande Bouffe* at Unit London. Dipping into all the various facets of culinary culture, Kristof paints snapshots of the whole journey of a meal, from source to mouth; getting fresh produce at the fish market, the utensils used to prepare and cook, and finally the delectable plates of steaming food. "Painting these common elements is a kind of way to make them iconic," Kristof summarises, "our history is made of iconic images, and we never stop evolving with them."

In his paintings, Kristof purposefully wants to play upon the everyday, ritual nature of food. Seeing himself as far from "storyteller" (he tells us that he has no desire to tell "stories") there are no narratives woven throughout his work, instead: "I just want to show daily life in order to get back to the source of what is important," Kristof shares. "By painting what is

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the baroque painter Frans Snyder – the artist who painted animals in the Rubens paintings – who directly inspired Kristof's fish market piece and Jean Brusselmans: "When I saw one of his exhibitions, it was a revelation," Kristof says, "I saw the freedom in his paintings. He was no longer looking for the perfect representation of the subjects, he just painted them in a stylistic, fast and brutal way." But, on top of these various points of the artistic canon, Kristof also looks directly to the kitchen, finding visual stimulation in cookbooks from the 60s and 70s with their inherent folk influence.

Not only looking to the world of art and its legacy, being what he describes as a "film freak" Kristof also finds inspiration for his work on the silver screen. Chantal Akerman's cult classic *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Brussel*, informed Kristof's painting *Beenhouwerij / Butcher Shop*, an exceptionally intricate, layered piece that expresses the charm of Kristof's style perfectly. A "hypnotic, real-time study of the household routine of a middle-aged woman", the film spoke to Kristof's penchant for the ritualistic and the mundane. "Everyday she uses the same objects, every week she visits the same stores, cooks the same meals. The routine feels suffocating as well as calming," Kristof details, "but most of all it made me want to honour the everyday banal objects that we use over and over again by painting an interpretation with a power that emanates from it." With subtle nods to the film, the figure has a striking resemblance to the picture's main character, Jeanne. The piece is a treat for film lovers and, of course, food lovers alike.



Kristof Santy: Beenhouwerij, Oil on Canvas (Copyright © Kristof Santy, 2022)